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FAR WEST

AMERICA'S LEADING WESTERN FICTION MONTHLY

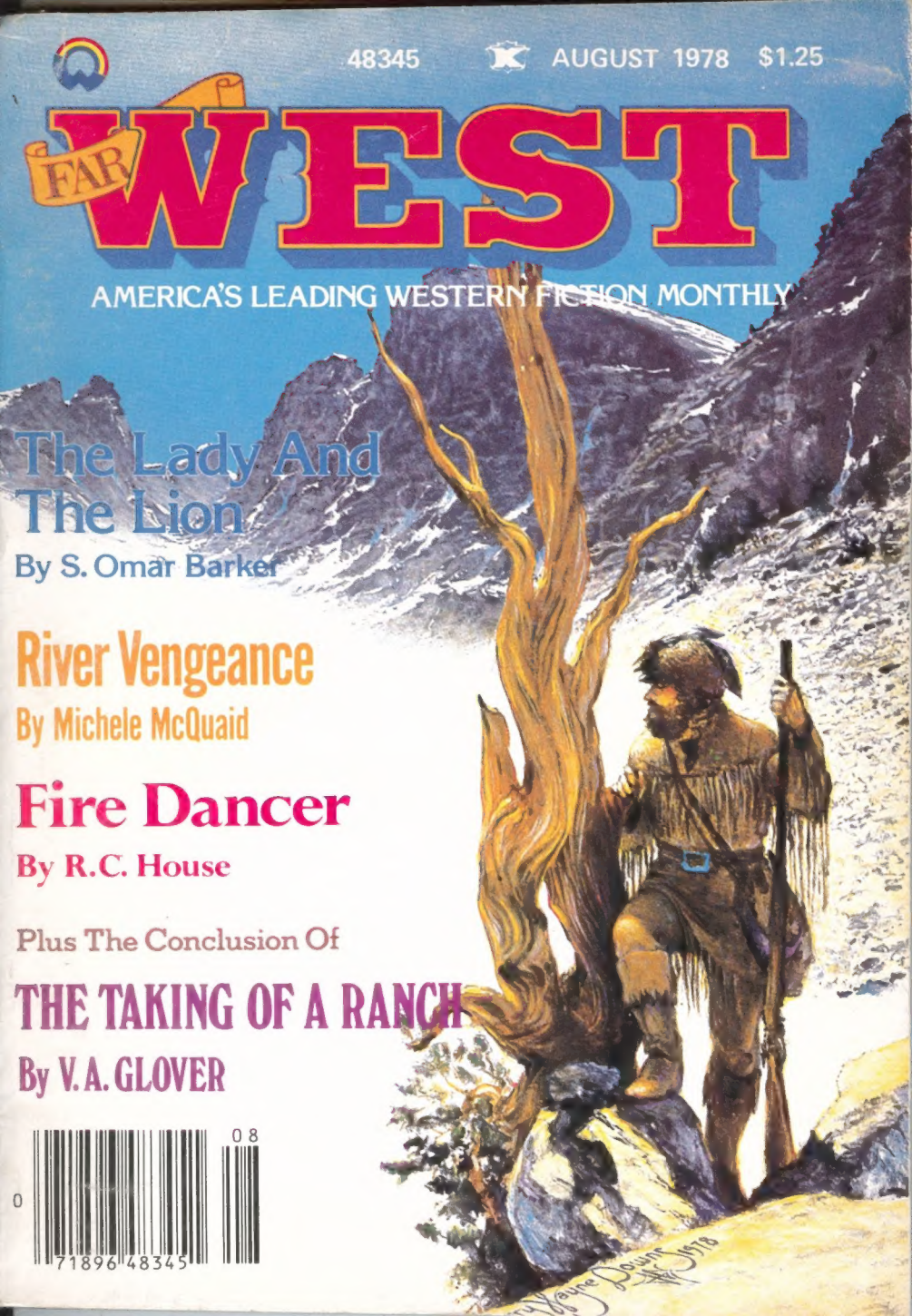
The Lady And The Lion
By S. Omar Barker

River Vengeance
By Michele McQuaid

Fire Dancer
By R.C. House

Plus The Conclusion Of

THE TAKING OF A RANCH
By V.A. GLOVER



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FAR WEST

AMERICA'S LEADING WESTERN FICTION MONTHLY

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MEMBER

WESTERN WRITERS
OF AMERICA

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NOTICE

There were three things that made the old-time cowboy stand out from his modern counterpart; his horse, his hat and his shootin' irons. Since virtually every story in FAR WEST concerns itself with at least two of the three elements that helped create the legend of the cowboy it might be a good idea to more closely examine those things which combined to make the cowboy unique.

In western fiction we read of only two or three types of horses. There are pintos and paints, roans and Appaloosa, and heros are usually mounted on flashy stallions or even-tempered mares. In fact this describes the color or sex of the horse, but says very little about what kind of animal our waddie is a ridin'.

The earliest horses to arrive in North America came from Spain. Although this will shatter a few myths, they weren't flashy Spanish Barbs or Andalusians. For the most part they were grade horses, animals of no specific breeding, but well formed, strong and capable of standing up to the rigors of a military campaign in the New World. Very few Spaniards brought prize horses to North America for the simple reason that a valuable animal was worth more in the breeding pens of Seville than a frying pan in Mexico.

By the mid-1700s the English were importing Thorobred horses into the colonies, and by 1800 two distinct American breeds made their appearance in the United States. Out west the mustang, the wild descendent of strayed Spanish herds was propigating the prairie while in the eastern United States Justin Morgan's horse was making quite a name for itself. In addition, Thorobreds were being raised, and grade horses were seen everywhere.

During the American Civil War the government embarked on a massive breeding program to provide horses for the cavalry. It was decided that the hardy little Morgan

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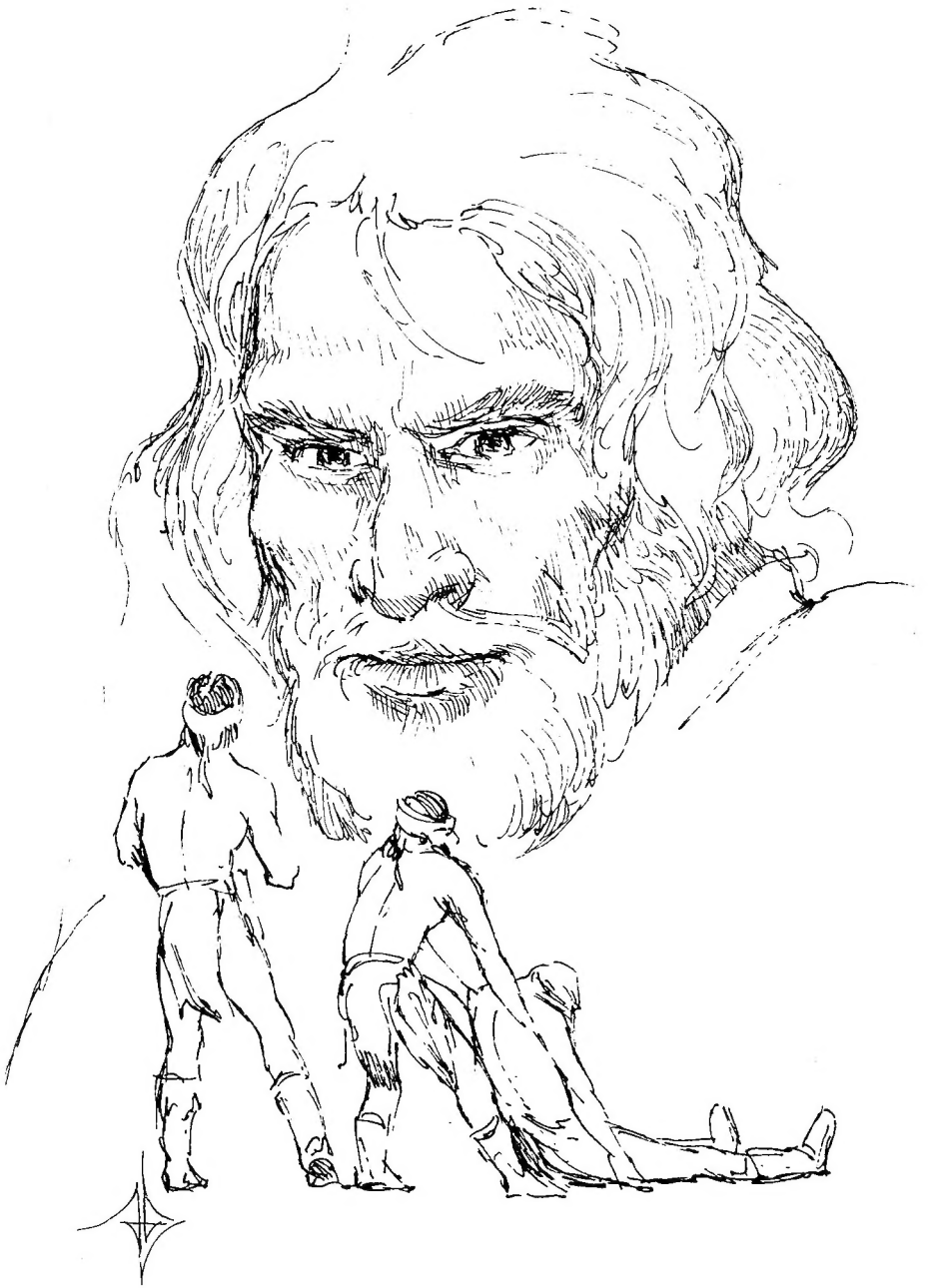

FIRE DANCER

By R.C. House

He had guts and he had a gun. If a man could have bulled his way through this scrape with that, Big Red Appleby would come out of it with his scalp. The trouble was that the last few shots for his big rifle he had short-charged because the flow of the precious black grains from his powderhorn had slowed to a trickle. He poked anxious fingers into the leather pouch on the table beside him for the rifle's lead balls. There were a frightening few of them clicking together in the dark emptiness of the pouch.

When he reached for a percussion cap to prime his charge from the round tin beside the bullet pouch he could see the silver-shine of the bottom. No point in counting. He was running low . . . on everything. Including luck.

Big Red nervously raked his fingers against his forehead to shove at the coppery hair that dripped over his eyes. He hadn't realized he was sweating. He smoothed the sticky strands against his bright red mane. His squared-off beard was the same color.

For a moment of shocked realization his fingers hung in his hair. For once in his life he was in real danger of losing it.

Big Red had always enjoyed the feeling of combing back his thick hair with his fingers. He was proud of the flaming mass that sprouted far down his forehead and the way people took notice of him because of it. They said redheads like Appleby had guts.

He stroked the side of his head, thinking some Apache might be wearing this hair on his belt tonight if something miraculous didn't happen. He was the only white man in God knows how

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far. There were a lot of Apaches out there.

It had been a long time since any of them had ventured into the clearing. He couldn't afford to leave the window, even to grab for something to eat. That could be the moment the pack of howling devils might break into the open and Big Red would be minus his hair and his life. His trembling was not all fatigue, but it *had* been a long day.

He had headed for coffee water at daybreak before going up to his diggings. A bullet sizzled the air close to his head and he heard the gun's blast muffled by distance. He saw them coming at him out of the trees at the edge of the clearing. He threw down his pail and sprinted for the rock shanty. He dropped the bar securing the door and grabbed his rifle and pouch and jumped to the window. He'd been there all day and the tension brought an ache to his muscles and his brain. His legs screamed for a chance to rest. If only he could sit down for a minute. Just for a minute, and close his eyes and rest. He felt he had been tight as a bowstring for an eternity.

The few bullets they had fired had thumped ineffectively against his rock wall. Still, each bullet's thud was a frightful experience; its message was: One of us will get you yet.

No way of knowing how many there were. Too many. Apaches were foxy. They stayed down. They wised up first thing in the morning after Appleby's rifle abruptly dropped the one who tried to cross the clearing.

The wounded man had wailed and moaned most of the morning and thrashed in pain but hadn't the strength to crawl away. Apaches, he'd been told, were stoic in pain. Not this one. The wound must have been grievous.

When the others tried to reach the writhing brave, Appleby's rifle beat them back. To hell with the wounded man, he thought.

"Ya'd show me no mercy, would ya?" he muttered. "Why should I bow to you?" His words were clipped and burred after his mother's native Scottish tongue.

Maybe he had winged one or two through the long day but

the only dead he could count was that first one. That one had lain in a quiet, twisted heap halfway across the clearing for several hours.

Appleby's cabin couldn't be reached except across that long, narrow clearing between the canyon walls. When he planned and piled up his stone-slab walls and topped them with a crude roof he knew the Apaches would some day challenge his right to be there. The two angled walls of canyon rock the shanty was built against towered over the clearing.

He had fitted the shanty with a narrow window and a door large enough to admit his broad shoulders. The window let in a little light, was wide enough to shoot through, but hard to shoot it from across the clearing.

Now splinters of westering sun poked sinister fingers through the trees at the top of the towering canyon walls over the cabin. Appleby still could see the clearing well. The leaves of aspens covering the Apaches wagged and flickered like silver wafers. Dusk crept in to fill the shanty.

He only hoped they'd run true to what he'd been told and leave off the siege at dark. He knew Apaches feared dying at night, feeling they'd enter eternity in a darkness from which there would be no dawn. They feared a crazy man as much, but Appleby still had as much sanity as he had confinement. The cover of night might give him a chance to think through an escape.

It was plain they wanted to finish him in daylight. But these weren't crazy men he was up against either. None would risk the fate of the lump of brown-skinned death in the clearing. All day they had tried darting out, drawing his rifle fire, hoping he'd be slow enough at loading so one man could race to the side of the cabin and grab the muzzle when Appleby poked the gun out.

So far he had been fast enough with his loading and firing. If an Apache ventured into the open and drew Appleby's shot, the second shot came so fast the brave figured to keep it up was sheer nonsense.

The Apaches valued life enough, it seemed, not to risk a grand charge on Appleby's shanty. No, at least today they were content to wait. Wear the man down, draw his fire, harass him until he panicked—or simply gave up. Then they'd move in for the kill.

Apaches, he knew before he came into their country, were disciples of the wolves. Circle the prey, nip at its heels, wear it down without putting their own hides on the line. When the victim turned mad with torment and frustration and was ready to die before enduring more, then go for the throat.

Big Red had known these things but never thought it would end by running out of ammunition. Watching the creeping darkness he prayed for the cover and quiet of velvet night.

Again Appleby looked helplessly at his dwindling supply of percussion caps. If the Apaches got smart enough or impatient enough to rush the shanty in these final minutes of daylight Appleby's chips would be cashed in that fast. Eyes behind his eyes saw it happening. He would get one, maybe two of them. This would put the bunch of them at the cabin walls and his window would be worthless.

Maybe they'd batter down his thick, pine-slab door. Or, they'd tear his cabin down, flat-stone by flat-stone. He might get one or two more but then they would be on him like howling wolves. Appleby touched his hair again. Maybe he had been as foolish as people had told him.

In another time and place, Big Red Appleby was known as a huge man strong enough to do the work of two. Until he got smart and headed west in search of the shiny metal that brought other men wealth and fame, his last job had been loading steamboats in St. Louis. Big Red could tip a full cask that took two men to lift and carry, hook his fingers against the barrelhead flange, hoist it up and walk on board with it. People also said he was a fool when they learned he was bound, by God, to head into forbidden Apache country far to the west to do his digging.

He'd known from the start they'd be coming for him; knew the Apaches could not tolerate a white intruder.

The showdown had been set that day at his glory hole that angled deep into the hillside and was his grotto of hope. Coming up for a drink, he had squinted against a blinding sun to see two riders outlined on a distant hill watching him. It had taken them two months to find him and they had. They were here and, for all of his planning, he wasn't prepared for them.

"Damn it to hell!" he thought. "Maybe I should just sit me down and relax and let them come. The sooner I'd have done with it. Here! What's this?"

A brown, melon-shaped head poked over the brush at the edge of the clearing turning indistinct with dusk. Appleby first saw the flickers of the sun-faded, red-grey cloth tying back the stringy black Apache hair. Even at a distance he saw the glint of black eyes narrowed in brooding anger at his arrogant intrusion upon sacred Apache soil.

Before Appleby could adjust his aim, the head disappeared. He judged his shot and squeezed the trigger. Though the cabin filled with a great belch of smoke and sound he heard a distinct yip and the bushes shook and were quiet. There were other howls of anger too. He had winged another Apache. Or killed him. As he reloaded night fell soft as river-bottom ooze.

Still Appleby stayed at his window, its slit losing form in the dark, waiting for them to move, to do something. He dared not light a fire but he groped beside him, his fingers caressing the down-soft ashes of last night's fire in his pit and the coarse iron roughness of his Dutch oven. Forgotten in the pot were last night's biscuits. Limp and tasteless as they had become he wolfed at them, free-flowing saliva sponging into his beard.

He leaped to the window when the first howls went up. Deep in the trees past the clearing the glow of a giant fire broke through the darkness between the trees and over the rocks.

Big Red heard too. Their howling, wailing, yipping, chanting pierced the night-quiet. It was their way of building their courage for the morning. They'd be alert as squirrels until dawn. Big Red was worn to a nub but his besiegers were filled with the untiring fire of the devil. Now their day of playing the

waiting game was over. They'd get frenzied and fired up tonight and with the first grayness of dawn they'd be at him with one maddened howl, to hell with the death-dealing scythe of his rifle's fire.

His mind raced.

"It'll be done, all done, the gold and all of life. Damn! That a man's welfare should hinge on the scant fixings for his piece! And them devils already dancing to their victory over me!"

Big Red stopped chewing in midbite. He carefully slid the rifle on the stone table. Realizing he still had a stale biscuit between his teeth he spit it out, indifferent now to hunger.

"Hold a minute! The game's not up just yet. There's yet one down card to be bet on."

He hastily unbuttoned his wool shirt, tugged at the shirttail and worked his feet out of his boots. He struggled at the fly-buttons of his breeches and, wriggling them over his giant thighs with difficulty, stepped away, naked.

"I'll beat them at their own game yet." His plan was clear, his thinking lucid.

The door opened quietly as he lifted the bar. The black air cooled and refreshed him after the cabin's stifling confinement. The crisp, clear sting of it in his nose and lungs strengthened his resolve.

The howling by the dire deep in the brush had risen to a screaming peak. Any other man would have crouched, sniveling at its fearful intensity. Not Appleby.

The idea that filled his mind would take guts and daring. It had come on him like a flash and must be carried out in a flash before he lost his will. There would be no sneaking past them to freedom. They would ride him down come morning before he'd gotten but a few miles.

"No, by Jimmy, I'll stay and that's a vow. Beat them at their own game."

The jagged rocks of the clearing stabbed bluntly at his bare feet. He wobbled painfully across the open space. For a minute, he knelt by his early morning kill. The lifeless shoulder he

touched had the cold, waxy feel of death. The smell and the aura of death floated close to the body. He did what had to be done and left his knife.

He stepped softly into the trees and brush bordering the clearing, closer now to the Apaches' fire. Their howling tore at his ears, splitting the air. Now he strode boldly toward them.

He could see them clearly, hot from the high-peaking fire that darted veins of orange light into the night and painted their wildly dancing, shrieking, sweating bodies with light. The spell-binding crack and leap of the fire and the war dancing caused them to toss themselves about heedlessly.

The frantic pull of the fire and the dance gripped Appleby's tormented mind too.

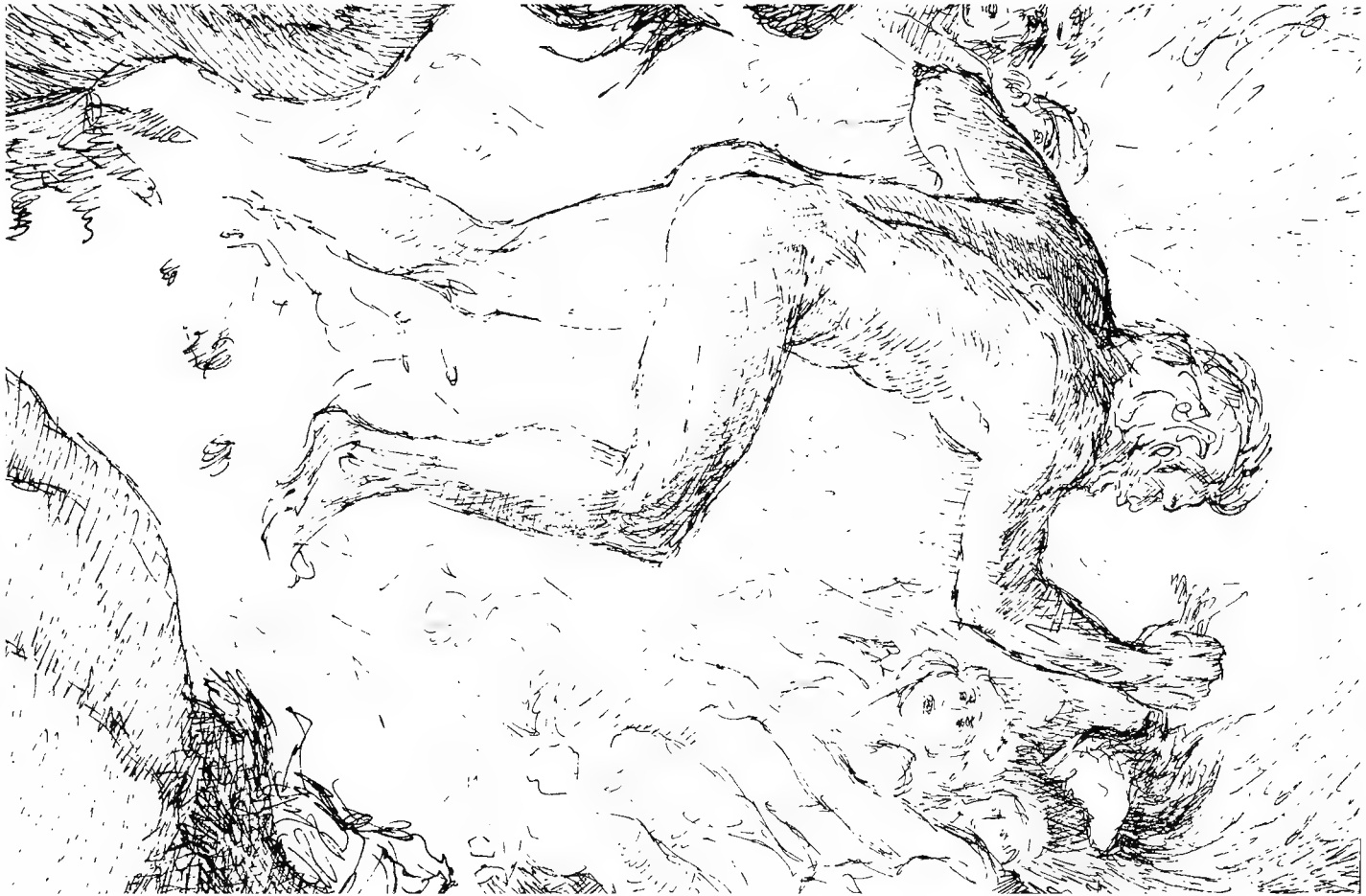
At the edge of the firelight, Big Red screamed his own beller of war. Flinging his arms high and twirling the long, black-haired scalp above him like a rope, he raced into their circle. He threw himself into the center of the flaming heap of logs.

"Invade my territory to run me off, would ya?" he screamed. "Dance, would ya? Then, come on! Dance!"

The spell that gripped the Apaches came over him. It fed on fatigue and hunger and thirst; the daylong badgering he'd suffered at their hands; the blood and the life and the scalp he'd taken from the still one in the clearing; the deep thrill when his rifle ball drew a surprised yip of pain; the knowing-in-fact that come morning they'd kill him outright for trespassing and killing their kind, or haul him away, gravely wounded, to be finished at a torture stake.

It was all there in the savagery that sucked him into the center of the Apaches' medicine fire. He shrieked, shaking the scalp at them, howling partly in pain but more in the consuming passion that had drawn him to their fire. It licked up his legs as he danced. He hopped frantically, kicking at the embers. The dazed Apaches stopped their howling and watched him, dumbfounded.

His bare feet charred like logs and spewed blood. Appleby flung the burning brands at them with his blackening bare toes,



stamping the fire to death. The sparks showered through the dark like heavens of shooting stars. The cowed Apaches dodged the flaring sticks and embers, yelling now in astonishment and disbelief.

Over it all, Appleby bellered with all the power each breath the fire's searing heat put into his lungs. He shook his grisly trophy at them and laughed and danced his wild, hopping dance, stomping and stifling the fire. The Apaches stood wide-eyed. In the dwindling light Appleby saw the horror, the fright—a naked kind of terror reflected in the circle of frozen faces.

With one last gesture of arrogance and defiance of their threat to his life he dashed the scalp into the embers at his feet to sizzle and send up a smoky stink. As suddenly as he had burst upon them Appleby rushed out of the fire ring, paying no heed to his charred feet. He bowled over two of the stunned Apaches as he raced through the dark for the clearing.

He remembered nothing of the sprint back to his rock shanty; only the pain was there, clawing up his black and blistered legs.

In the morning Appleby was delirious with the stabs in his legs that reached up to coat his groin and belly with a flaming agony. He wasn't aware when three Apaches crept meekly out, keeping wide eyes on the cabin, to drag the long-dead and scalpless one to the trees.

Big Red Appleby would never walk without pain the rest of his life.

Through it he made his strike and stumped stiff-legged back to his world a wealthy man.

Yet for all the time he was in their land the Apaches in their superstition rode wide of the high box canyon and its tiny stone shanty. They built a legend around a most wild and evil spirit that dwelled there. The spirit became known as the Big Flame-Topped Fire-Dancer.

Years after Big Red was gone, they continued to fear and avoid the place.

RIVER VENGEANCE

By Michele A. McQuaid

Rueban Grant had turned to man hunting. Belly flat in the shallow depression he'd scratched out of the Sonoran desert, he sighted on the four bunched men riding toward him. Patiently he waited until the leader, his kinky red hair visible under his *sombrero*, edged ahead and then Grant adjusted his aim, zeroing in on the man's forehead. He fired. The *sombrero* bounced off the red head and immediately the four

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riders swerved, spurring away from the ambush. Grant stood up, cursing, firing his Colt revolving rifle three more times, but the men were out of range, the bullets pinging at the horses' rear hooves. "Goddamn you!" Grant shouted. "Goddman you, Max Grisome!"

Dejected, he stood there a moment, watching the cloud of dust sift down to the desert floor. Then he spun around and walked back towards the low line of foothills where he'd hidden his horse. This was the second time he'd fouled up. It meant more days of tracking while juggling his scouting duties for the Mormon Battalion.

Funny how it'd taken the Mexican War to give him a line on Grisome. A stray word from a green recruit had done it. That was principally why he'd joined on as scout for the Mormon Battalion. The unit was going in the right direction as part of Colonel Stephen W. Kearny's Army of the West—the invasion force responsible for wresting New Mexico and California from the Mexicans.

Rueban Grant had been a natural choice for the job. He knew the New Mexico territory, having trapped beaver in 1824 on the Gila and San Pedro Rivers with Sylvester and James Pattie. He was an irreverent Mormon. At forty-two, he was robust, a bear of a man, tall and bulky, carrying most of his weight in his barrel chest. His hands and feet were ham-like in their width, his arms and legs thick-muscled. There was no gray in his coarse, shaggy, black hair and full beard.

Grant reached his horse and jammed his rifle into the boot. Then he swung into the saddle and headed the animal south, deeper into the Mexican province of Sonora. Kearny's army and the Mormon Battalion were two months away from their easy Santa Fe victory and about a week from reaching the San Pedro River.

The three shrieking Apaches swirled out of the foothills, cutting the trail in front of Grant, their squat, burnished bodies hugged close to their mounts' necks. Startled, Grant wrenched his horse to the left, furiously kicking the animal's flanks as he

yanked at his Colt Paterson revolver. A lance smashed into Grant's saddle, grazing his calf, pinning his pants' leg to the leather. Twisting sideways, Grant stared into the Apache's sweat-blotched, dust-crusted face; then as the Indian lunged for him, Grant swung up the thirty-four caliber revolver and fired into his thick, corded neck. The Indian's body snapped backwards, then slid from the pony's back. The screaming behind him rose to a crescendo and Grant's stomach turned, bile surging into his mouth. He flattened himself against his mount's back just as another lance and a swift volley of arrows sailed over his head, pitting the trail in front of him. His horse swerved around the thin obstacles, a rear hoof snapping one of the shafts. Pounding behind Grant told him one of the remaining Apaches was gaining on him. Brazenly, he whirled his horse around, crashing into the Indian, snapping off a shot. His aim was sloppy, the bullet catching the brave in the shoulder instead of the chest as Grant had planned. However the jarring collision and impact of the slug knocked the Apache under his own pony's hooves. Grant sped away from the trampling, firing as fast as he could cock the thirty-four's hammer at the third Apache. Twice he missed but his fifth and last bullet caught the Indian's pinto in the head, tumbling the Apache. Grant saw him roll free in a curled ball, then spring to his feet and begin racing after him. The Apache's stocky legs under the squat, compact body pumped like pistons.

"To hell with it," Grant muttered, then spurred his horse into a run, heading south again.

Rueban Grant rode past the Mormon Battalion standard bearers, the late afternoon sun glinting off their brass staffs. He saw Lieutenant Colonel Cooke gesture at him from a bunched group of officers but continued on down the long column of wagons and outriders. At the trail's side he saw Pick's wagon, slanted to the left, missing its rear wheel, and he stopped.

Jess Pickford (Pick to everyone) came around the side, wiping thick, black, axle grease from his hands. "What

happened, Rueban? Mexicans?" he gestured with his smudged rag at the caked blood on Grant's pants' leg.

"Apaches. Won't be the last I'll see of them either since I left one afoot."

Pick nodded, "Give me a hand? Just about ready to put the sucker back on."

"Sure." Grant swung off his horse, following Pick to the rear of the wagon.

From behind Pick looked like a bull. His neck was stumpy and a permanent sunburned red, crisscrossed with flaking, white skin. His shoulders were broad, heavy-boned and thick-muscled, while his arms and legs were short for his torso size. Close to Grant's age, his brown hair was grizzled with grey. Yet the sparkle in his blue eyes made him appear younger than his friend.

"See any Mexicans, Rueban?"

"No, but I know they're out there. Just because Governor Armijo sold out Santa Fe for five hundred ounces of gold doesn't mean every Mexican soldier hightailed it for Mexico City."

"Courier came through here today. There's revolting against the troopers Kearny left behind. Eight of them bought it in Mora. Fighting in Taos too."

"Drunken soldiers make trouble for themselves," Grant commented.

Pick tested the pole he had wedged under the axle. "Courier also said the New Mexicans are calling Colonel Doniphan's march through Chihuahua the *Jornada del Muerto*—journey of death."

"He's bucking ninety miles of bad desert, worse than what we'll see with Kearny on this march to the Pacific Ocean."

"Lean on the pole, Rueban. I'll slip this sucker on."

Pick had already greased the axle so as Grant, grunting, levered the wagon off the ground, he shoved the wheel back into position. "Now ease her down, Rueban. Well, it seems to me Kearny's letting the Battalion ride drag for him. He out-

distanced us again today. I don't figure he expects us to see fighting. I do figure he's using the Mormon Battalion to open up a wagon trail across this territory for when it's American."

Grant shrugged, walking to his horse. Back up the column he saw one of Cooke's aides coming for him. "Who cares, Pick," he sounded disgusted.

"Reuban, see anything of Grisome?"

"Yeah, I queered it!" Grant swung into the saddle, jabbing his spurs into his horse's flanks, and disappeared.

Max Grisome sat hunched over close to the campfire. Every nerve was alert, his long, bony fingers clenching and unclenching the tin coffee mug. Somewhere out there in the darkness was his enemy. He knew that for sure because he remembered how determined Reuban Grant could be. But why? That was the question that bugged him. He'd never figured Grant as the kind who'd nurture a grudge for twenty-two years.

Repeatedly his eyes roamed over the camp's rocky perimeter, searching the shadows thrown by stunted brush. He caught a flickering movement and his fingers snaked out for his skinning knife just as Dulles, one of his men, walked into the light.

Dulles glanced at the wickedly curved blade gleaming in the firelight. "Who the hell is that *hombre* and what's he dogging you for? He's been on your ass since Missouri and today he got too damn close, Max."

"Shit! It's stupid." Grisome ground his knuckles into his tired eyes. "But it's the only thing that makes sense. His name is Rueban Grant. I guess he wants to kill me for stealing a bundle of beaver. But damn! I thought that score was settled twenty-two years ago in Mexico."

As he talked, Grisome saw Grant, himself and a hundred other trappers heading south in 1824 from Council Bluffs into New Mexico territory. It had taken until November to get trapping licenses from the Mexican government. Then everyone had split up into small groups, Grant going with the Patties to the headwaters of the Gila and San Pedro Rivers. Grisome, on his own, had followed them.

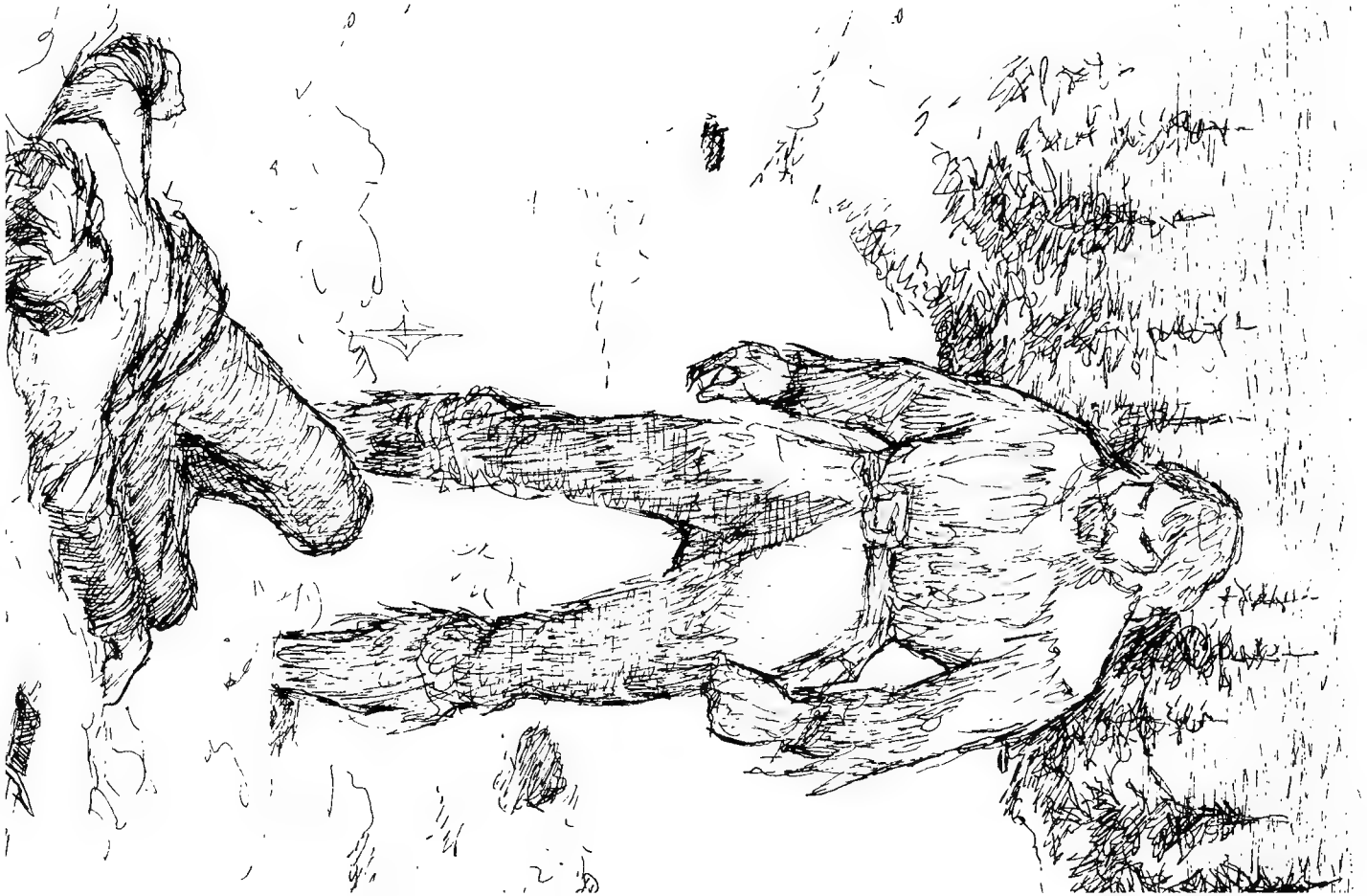
The cold, lead-colored sky stretched endlessly above the headwaters. Normally the streams were dry or, at best, were trickling creeks, but now they were a rushing froth, the Mexican monsoons having filled them. From his vantage point on the high bluff, wedged behind jumbled rock and ink-black pines, Grisome watched Grant moving along the river bank, checking his traps, dropping them in disgust. "Won't find a beaver left," Grisome chuckled. "I already got them."

He watched until Grant was out of sight, then he shouldered the freshly-skinned, bundled furs and worked his way down the back side of the bluff, heading away from the river towards his own camp. Peripherally he caught sight of the buckskin clad leg lashing out at the back of his knees but not in time, and he went down hard with the kick, the furs tumbling down the slope away from him. Grant jumped on his back as they both slid after them, Grant yelling in his ear, "You goddamn, trap-robbing bastard!"

At the bottom, Grisome twisted sideways, jabbing his knee at Grant's groin but connecting with the upper thigh instead. Simultaneously, he smashed his fist into Grant's nose as Grant was fumbling for his skinning knife, spilling him into the snow. Cat-like, Grisome leaped on top of Grant, gouging at the eyes, hammering two, sharp punches to the jaw. There was a sharp pop as the bone dislocated. Blinded by his own blood, the pain from his jaw exploding in his head, Grant sliced at Grisome's throat, the skinning knife making a swishing sound as it cut air. Grisome scrambled to his feet and kicked the knife away, breaking two of Grant's fingers with the blow. Then he deliberately kicked Grant in the ribs and groin until he saw his head loll sideways as he passed out.

For a moment, Grisome stood over Grant, sucking in great gulps of cold air until his pulse stopped pounding. Then his eyes located the furs, and he wove over to them. The first snowflakes were falling as he shouldered the bundle and left Grant to freeze.

Somewhere out on the Sonoran desert a coyote howled, the



thin cry hanging long and shrill in the cold night air. Pick sipped his coffee in warm comfort and watched Grant move restlessly from wagon to wagon in the circle. Grant, Pick remembered, hadn't always been this way. Oh, sure, Rueban had been a roustabout and a roamer: a trapper, an Erie Canal bargeman, a goodtimer and a savage fighter when roused. But he'd never been a killer, prowling like a caged animal. Pick was sorry to see the change but he understood why. He could only hope it was temporary—over when this vendetta with Grisome was over.

He supposed it'd started when Grant had realized he was middle age and wanted something better for his remaining years than cold ground for a bed. He supposed Suzanna had been part of that decision too. Suzanna had been the daughter of the Mormon farmer whom Grant and he had been roustabouts for. Grant had fallen for her, had married her and had turned Mormon for her. But Grant had never been devout, unlike himself who, as his bulwark against old age, had joined up right when Joseph Smith was first preaching. Rather, Grant was the kind of man who held his *Book of Mormon* in his left hand and his gun in his right, especially with all the persecutions.

How Grisome and his boys had got the drop on them Pick would never know, but he could still see Grant's house and the settlement burning around them.

The flames shot upward through the bare limbs of the poplar tree, silhouetting its gauntness against the night sky. Bunched together with the other Mormons, Pick, Grant and Suzanna, holding their ten-month-old daughter, watched helplessly as Grisome and his men careened between the houses, tossing crackling pine torches through the windows, trampling down fences, overturning anything in their path. Grant was clenching and unclenching his fists; somehow with getting Suzanna and the baby out of their burning house there had been no time to grab his gun. He watched as Grisome and his men regrouped at the end of the street, then yelling, put their horses down it at a run. "Let that be a warning to you, proselytes!" Grisome

shouted as they swept past.

The shot boomed out above the sound of burning houses and one of Grisome's men fell. Grant whirled and saw an old man with a blunderbuss limping off deeper into the flickering shadows. The crowd broke apart around him and he saw Pick jostled away with part of it. Cold fear clutching at his throat, Grant grabbed Suzanna and was tossing her and the baby to the ground when Grisome fired. He thought his eardrums would burst with the explosion; then as the re-echoing din lessened, he heard Grisome and his men ride away.

He sat up. Beside him in a curled, crumpled heap lay Suzanna and the child, both dead, their dark purple blood mingling and spreading over Suzanna's white nightdress.

Pick had come up and had rubbed his hand over his face. Looking at him, Grant has said quietly, "As you are my friend and witness, Jess Pickford, I will kill Max Grisome."

Grant was not in the area Cooke had told him to scout. He was farther west, his eyes flicking up the sandy trail towards the scattered, farming terraces scratched out of the gravelly hills. This morning he had stumbled over the charred remains of Grisome's campfire.

From the hills the sharp staccato of gunfire crackled back to him. Raking his horse's flanks, Grant raced towards it, yanking his Colt Paterson. He plunged through the gap and swept past dead, straw-colored corn stalks, squash vines crawling lushly beneath them. Then as he rounded a curve in the trail and the Mexican *pueblo* below him sprang into view, he fought his horse to a standstill. The *pueblo* was wrecked. Strewn over the plaza were straw produce baskets, earthen water jars and peons, both men and women, their bodies bent akimbo.

A spatter of English drew Grant's attention to the opposite side of the bowl-like valley. He saw Grisome leading his three men farther west. Angrily, cocking his thirty-four, Grant spurred his horse through the *pueblo* and up the trail on the opposite side. As soon as he was within minimal range, he fired. The bullet clipped one of the laggers in the shoulder. He reeled

but kept his saddle. Grisome and the other two wheeled and returned the fire, the lead ricochetting around Grant. He caught rock fragments in his cheek but cocked and fired again. Grisome and his men hesitated, then, shouting something Grant couldn't catch, spun around and charged out of the valley.

Grant was in hot pursuit when the first musketball splattered the trail in front of him. Twisting around, he saw a Mexican patrol strung out behind him, some with muskets in various stages of aiming, others with lances tilted slightly forward. He tried getting more speed from his mount but the animal, winded from his run to the hills and then through the valley, could barely maintain. Grant saw an officer pulling ahead of the others. He fired three more well-spaced shots but his aim was erratic due to his horse's uneven stride. His thirty-four was now useless; in order to reload it he would have to break it down into three pieces, and he was sure to lose one.

Suddenly his horse went down underneath him. Although he tumbled free, his head struck the gravel trail. For a moment he was stunned. Then as he rolled his head to clear the cobwebs, something pricked his throat. Grant opened his eyes and looked up at the Mexican officer. Sneering, he flicked his lance at Grant's Adam's apple, drawing a trickle of blood.

Grant lay still, waiting for the next move, studying the man above him. He'd seen plenty of this kind of Mexican officer. Patrician features twisted in disgust, hating every moment he was forced to spend in the territory. He'd probably been sent out from Mexico City for some indiscretion, maybe for romancing his commanding officer's wife.

"Lieutenant Urrea, please let the prisoner stand up. I would like to ask him some questions."

Grant looked past Urrea and saw the rest of the patrol grouped in a half circle, the Captain standing in the center. Something was familiar about the man, though he was older, and as Grant got to his feet he searched his memory. It took him back twenty-two years. "Aguayo."

"Si, Senor Grant. For days I have been certain we would

run into each other again. Although not under quite these circumstances. I had thought you would find us as Kearny's scout."

"I scout for the Mormon Battalion."

Aguayo shrugged, "It is all the same." His voice was lightly sarcastic.

"No. Let me explain, Aguayo, in case you're planning on throwing the Mexican Army at us. The Battalion's not really a fighting unit. All of us signed up only for a year on the guarantee we'll be mustered out when we reach the Pacific Ocean. We're really looking for a region, separate from the States, where we can settle without persecution. We even brought our wives and children but had to leave them behind in Santa Fe."

Aguayo was laughing. "This is the only Mexican Army I've seen," and he gestured at the soldiers behind him. They wore ragged, white cotton uniforms, carried old smoothbore muskets and looked tired and hungry.

"Excuse me, *Capitan,*" Urrea interrupted, "but let us get to the point. The *pueblo* . . ."

Aguayo silenced him with a snap of his fingers. "You must pardon Urrea's rudeness but he's unhappy with his purgatory. However, why did you and the others wipe out that village?" His eyes had gone metallic, his beaked nose suddenly cruel above his thin, taut lips.

"I didn't!" Grant snapped. "It was Grisome and his bunch." His fists knotted and his words, as he continued, were strangled. "They did the same thing in Missouri and killed my wife and little girl. I've been after him ever since. I was chasing him when I picked up you *hombres.* Now his trail's gone cold again."

"The old Grisome?"

Grant nodded, "He's mine, Aguayo."

"No longer, *Senor* Grant. He killed many Mexican sons and daughters today. And until your flag flies over Mexico City, this is Mexican land ruled by Mexican law and I will administer it."

Aguayo was silent a moment, watching Grant's face set,

knowing he was thinking, "Like hell."

"However, we could help each other, *Senor* Grant, if it would not test your loyalties too much." The light sarcasm was back in Aguayo's voice.

"I'm listening."

"I could turn you loose. You could find Grisome again, this time for us."

Grant smiled at Aguayo's diplomacy, at the unsaid thing, at the insurance he knew Aguayo would take. But it was a chance, the only one he had. He certainly couldn't kill Grisome while hogtied and riding drag as a Mexican prisoner.

Aguayo read Grant's acceptance, *"Vaya con Dios."* He watched as Grant stepped past Urrea, walked to his grazing horse, checked the animal's legs, mounted and spun off in the direction they'd seen Grisome disappear.

Urrea angrily stepped forward. "You're a fool, *Capitan.* He will go right back to Kearny or that Battalion of his and they will dig us out."

Aguayo stiffened, then shrugged, catching control of himself. "It is you, Lieutenant Urrea, who is a fool. I could shoot you for what you have said. But what is the point? Your kind, now that the Americans have come, is a dying breed." He watched Urrea flush. "You flatter yourself. What man of Kearny's strength would bother with a twelve-man patrol Mexico City has forgotten, ill-clothed, ill-armed, ill-fed, without morale? The Americans are going to win in spite of us, Urrea. Also Grant is only interested in killing Grisome. He's not going to waste time on anything else. So determined is he that your duty, Lieutenant Urrea, is to follow Grant and make sure he doesn't kill Grisome until I arrive."

Urrea saluted and stalked off.

Aguayo called after the ramrod-straight back, "Grant is an honorable man. Treat him as such."

Urrea turned back to his commander, "How do you know, *Capitan?*"

"Because twenty-two years ago Grisome left Grant to freeze.

When Grant finally found him in a Santa Fe *cantina,* he settled the score in a fist fight. I arrested both of them and sentenced them to hard labor because they could not pay the *cantina* owner for damages."

The screaming carried across the Sonaran desert, great, gulping shrieks of it. Grant followed the sound until he found the man he'd wounded buried in sand up to his neck, red ants crawling over his bloated and sun-blackened face. "Apaches," and a cold shiver went down Grant's spine. Sickened, he pulled his reloaded revolver and mercifully shot the man through the head.

As he rode away, studying the trail markings, he guessed at what had happened. Probably the wounded man had fallen behind Grisome, been left, then had been jumped and captured by the Apaches. If he was right, Grisome was somewhere ahead of him but with Indians on his tail.

As Grant climbed into the foothills the country changed around him, becoming more rocky, studded with boulders and stunted pines clinging to the thin soil. Deeper in he knew there was a water hole, a shallow saucer hollowed out of slab rock. Usually there was little water, but he knew Grisome had made a dry camp the night before and so would take a chance and head for it. Cautiously Grant climbed, half expecting to be jumped. His shirt was plastered to his back with nervous sweat. With two enemies up there he was certain he was riding into an ambush, but the hate in his gut drove him forward.

The trail switchbacked through a marble game of boulders. Then ten feet below him was the water hole, Grisome standing with his back to him, intently studying the opposite wall, one man flat bellied, drinking, and the last fighting a horse to the water hole edge. Grant levered his Colt revolving rifle out of the boot, aimed at Grisome's back and then thought better of backshooting him. This time, this close, he couldn't miss. He wanted Grisome to know who owned the slug that got him.

"Turn around, you miserable son of a bitch," Grant snapped.

Startled, Grisome whirled, scrabbling for his handgun while

the belly-flat man sprang to his feet and the horse broke free of his rider as the man's grip slackened.

Grisome saw the rifle aimed at his chest and halted his draw. "We expected Apaches, not you."

"Guess so. You must have heard your friend screaming for miles."

Grisome shrugged, "Tough break for Dulles but a man's got to protect his own hide."

"You've just run out of hide, Grisome," and Grant cocked the rifle.

Suddenly a wanging sound filled the air, then a squash as the Apache lance smashed into the man who had lost his horse. Grisome and his remaining saddle pal threw themselves to the slab rock, pulling revolvers. Grant looked across and above the water hole, saw an Apache disappearing into a clump of boûlders and fired. The bullet took the Indian high in the back, shoving him headlong onto the rocks. Grant didn't wait for a reaction from the rest of the war party but, crouching, sprinted down to Grisome.

As Grant slid down next to him, Grisome smirked, "Never thought I'd see the day."

"Look, I only saved your neck because I'm not getting cheated out of putting a slug into you personally."

Then the canting started, the bodiless wailing picked up on all four sides of the water hole. The three men scooted into the only available cover—behind a small undulation in the rock. "Shit," Grisome swore. "We're sitting ducks."

"How does it feel?" Grant asked, pleasure creeping into his voice.

Grisome didn't get a chance to answer. His partner suddenly gave a grunt and doubled over, gripping his belly. His face, pale and contorted, was beaded with sweat. "Bad water," he gasped.

Almost simultaneously the air above them sang with arrows, the slender, wooden shafts clattering down on the rock, like tacks on a wood floor. Under the cover of the barrage, seven Apaches began working their way down the slopes. Grant

inched his head up enough to quickly aim and snap off two shots. One Apache, caught in the belly, rolled down the slope like a sawdust doll. Another threw himself flat and began inchworming his way down. Grisome waited until he was within range, then as the Indian raised himself, chucking his lance, Grisome put a slug through his forehead. The lance, however, slammed into the sick man's back. From above them a musket roared, followed by the sharp report of a dragoon. Two more Apaches went down and Grant, glancing up, saw Urrea step into cover behind a boulder. The remaining Apaches, their attack broken, sprinted back up the slope.

Then Grisome made his move, scrambling out of the depression, intent on making it up to Grant's horse. Grant dived after him, grabbing his leg, skidding on his belly after him. Grisome lashed out with his foot, trying to break Grant's grip, but the huge fingers only bit deeper into his calf. Flipping over, Grisome swung his gun barrel at Grant's head but Grant ducked, then hammered his fist into Grisome's nose. Grisome screamed as the cartilege shattered, then threw himself on Grant, wrapping his arms around him like a bear, squeezing down on the ribs. Suddenly Grant, wheezing for air, shifted his weight, throwing himself into a roll. Locked together, the two men tumbled to the edge of the water hole and pitched into the alkali water. The fall broke their grip on each other; desperately they struggled on the slick bottom for new holds. Grant, due to his own bulk, slipped under Grisome, and Grisome's fingers found Grant's throat under the matted beard. Squeezing, he forced Grant's head below the surface. Grant felt the crusty water rushing into his lungs as he frantically gasped for air. His legs and arms flailed at the water as a nasty blackness began filling his head. Then dimly he heard the dragoon crackle again. Grisome grunted, swore, released Grant and dragged himself out of the water hole. Crouching low, gripping his left arm, a thin, red stream oozing down it, he ran up the slope and threw himself onto Grant's mount. Jabbing at the horse's flanks he charged away from the water hole in the direction of the San Pedro River.

Slowly Grant sat up, wracking coughs shaking his body until he finally vomited up most of the alkali water. His vision cleared and glancing up, saw Urrea hook his dragoon over his belt, then disappear into the jumble of boulders.

Inside Grant's heart felt like a piece of lead. It was over. He had lost. He knew it even before he heard the Mexican bugle's distant, tinkling music.

The San Pedro River, full from the monsoons, looked like a silver ribbon in the late afternoon sunlight. Grant, on a captured horse, rode down to its bank where the Mexicans and Grisome stood. Grisome's hands were tied behind his back. Facing him was a firing squad of six, muskets primed, Urrea standing to one side ready to give the clipped orders. For a moment Grant wagered what his chances were of firing before the Mexicans, but he gave up the idea as a signal from Aguayo trained the squad's muskets on him.

"It would be a foolish gesture, *Senor* Grant," Aguayo said. "What does it matter to you how Grisome dies just as long as he does it in payment for his crimes?"

Grant said nothing, his eyes fixed on Grisome's bloody face. He tried hard to bring back his little girl's face, but could not.

"Let it go, *amigo*. Go back to your battalion and find your new home. You have a goal and, therefore, a future. Take it. Do not give this dirt," and Aguayo gestured at Grisome, "the satisfaction of poisoning it."

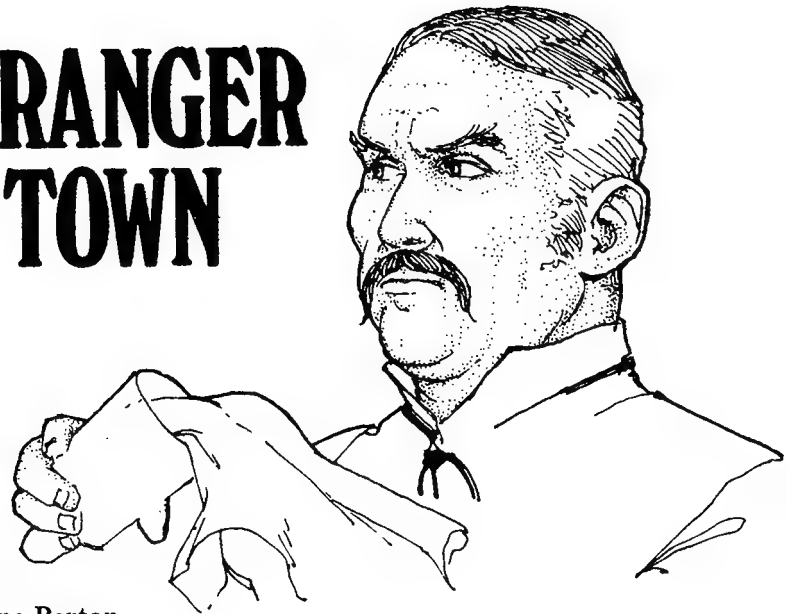
Grant shifted his gaze north on the San Pedro. Aguayo was right. Grisome was going to die. Suzanna and his little girl would be avenged. Ahead of him lay Tucson and the Pacific Ocean, a new home and other children. If he wanted it. If he walked away now.

"*Gracias,* Aguayo." Grant turned his mount.

"Wait, damn you!" Grisome screamed. "Why, Grant? For something that happened here twenty-two years ago? For a beating and a lousy bundle of beaver fur?"

Grant twisted around, "No, that's not the reason." Then he spurred his horse away. Behind him, he heard the overlapping crackle of six muskets.

STRANGER IN TOWN



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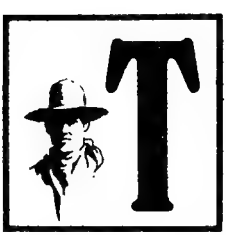

The stranger was trouble. Luke Snyder, the barkeep, recognized the signs almost before the man slapped his dust-streaked hat down on the bar and called for whiskey. Snyder brought a bottle and glass, silently wishing the sheriff hadn't been called out of town that evening. He smiled at the stranger as he poured the drink.

"Evening. Been riding far?"

"Far enough."

The newcomer was a big man, dressed in grimy trail clothes and sporting a three-day beard. The butt of an old Star .44 thrust from the waistband of his pants, where it looked like he'd need all day to draw it. He slid a silver dollar out on the bar.

"I'm down from Montana Territory. You can leave the bottle."

Snyder nodded and retreated down the bar. Across the

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room, he saw Buck Harmon nudge his two companions and whisper something. All three laughed, and Snyder inwardly braced himself. He might have known Buck would be the one to start it.

In his own way, Buck Harmon was trouble, too. Snyder had seen it when the kid first rode into town with his brother Kyle and Lafe Barnett. Too lazy to work and too smart to steal, the three had been paid out of a trail herd by a disgusted cow boss, and had come to Standing Rock to tree the town. They had been certain to get crossways with Sheriff Tom Bannon, and Snyder had seen it happen.

Buck had been bragging about his speed with a gun, and had taken a bet with one of the barflies to prove it. Snyder had been standing behind the saloon with the rest when the shots brought Tom Bannon on the run. The sheriff saw what was happening and stopped to watch.

"Throw three, Kyle," Buck said. Kyle Harmon, kneeling at his brother's feet, sent three empty bottles spinning into the air. Buck drew and fired, the three shots seeming to merge into one. The bottles vanished in a spray of shattered glass. Buck reloaded and holstered the gun before turning around.

"That's twenty dollars, mister. Pay me."

The man dug deep in his pocket and came up with a golden eagle. He fingered it ruefully, then tossed it to Buck.

"That's mighty fine shooting, young feller. I didn't think anybody was that fast."

"What's this all about?" Bannon demanded. He had pushed through the crowd, the watchers edging away as they noticed him. Buck turned to face him, smiling. Kyle stood up hastily on Buck's right, while Lafe Barnett moved around on the left.

"Not a thing, Sheriff," Buck said. "Just settling a bet."

"Folks here don't care much for shooting in town. Maybe you three better check your guns with me."

Buck shook his head regretfully, his hand easy on his pistol butt.

"We couldn't do that, Sheriff. These other folks are packing

irons. We might need ours."

Luke Snyder saw the struggle on the lawman's face. Bannon had carried a star a long time, long enough to know when he was overmatched. He couldn't take these three alone, and the realization showed in his eyes.

"All right. But stay out of trouble. No more shooting in town."

"You bet, Sheriff," Buck agreed with a grin. "Anything you say."

But he had won, and the town wasn't long in finding it out.

"Barkeep. Another one," Buck grinned. "Put it on my bill."

"Coming."

Snyder gritted his teeth. He knew when that bill would be paid, and he felt a burning anger toward the town's other merchants. It didn't have to be that way. Tom Bannon had given them their chance the day a group of irate citizens had called on him to demand action. Homer Wills, the mayor and owner of the general store, had been their spokesman.

"Something has to be done, Sheriff! Those hoodlums act like they own the town! They take anything they want, and say to put it on their bill. Why, they should be arrested, or run out of town!"

"That's what I've been trying to tell you." Bannon pulled open a desk drawer, produced a handful of deputy's badges. "With you men to stand with me, we can put a stop to this today."

Wills was taken aback. "Now, wait a minute, Tom. That's your job. You've never asked for deputies before."

"Never needed them," Bannon said grimly. "Well?"

"Well, I don't know. There are three of them, and that Buck Harmon is mighty good with a handgun."

Bannon looked at him steadily. "That's right. There are three of them, and Buck's fast with a gun."

"Why, just last week—." Wills broke off abruptly as he realized the import of Bannon's stare. "Now, don't get the idea that we're scared. It's just—."

"Would any of you be willing to file charges on Buck or his friends?" Bannon cut in. He looked at each man. Only Luke Snyder would meet his eyes. "I thought not. Is there anything else?"

They slipped out one by one. Snyder was the last to go.

"I'll stand with you, Sheriff," he said. "I'm not much good with a gun, but I'll try."

Bannon smiled at him and shook his head. His brown eyes were tired.

"No good, Luke. We'd need more men. Thanks."

And Snyder had turned away to go back to his bar.

"Barkeep! C'mon, hurry it up."

Snyder shook off his thoughts and poured Buck a second drink. The stranger roused himself, looked at Buck. Buck gave him an easy grin.

"Howdy, mister. Did I hear you say you come from Montana?"

The stranger nodded amiably. "Reckon you did. I don't see how else you'd know."

Buck blinked, and Snyder suppressed a smile. He knew the big man was trouble, but Buck wouldn't see that. All he'd see was a big, dumb-looking drifter. Someone to push.

Buck regrouped and tried again. "Are you trying to be funny, stranger?"

The stranger took a sip of his drink, then looked at Buck again. He shook his head.

"Nope."

"Well, I think you are. You're trying to make me look the fool."

The other patrons in the saloon heard the rising anger in Buck's voice and turned to watch. Kyle and Lafe sidled around to cover the stranger's back. He didn't seem to notice. He rested his elbows on the bar and shrugged.

"It doesn't seem to me you need any help with that, friend."

Buck flushed at the sudden laughter from the onlookers. He took a menacing step toward the stranger.

"Look here, drifter, you're making it mighty plain you don't like me and my friends. You'd better ask some of these folks who I am before you go much farther."

The big man went back to his drink. "I know who you are," he assured Buck. "I ain't got a thing against you boys. I've seen lots of young punks throwing their weight around, and they don't bother me a bit."

The laughter this time was lost in a frantic scramble as other drinkers cleared out of the way. Buck stood frozen for a second. Then he stepped away from the bar, right hand poised over the butt of his sixgun.

"All right, mister! Fill your hand!"

The stranger looked up in surprise, his glass still in his hand. He put it down on the bar.

"Easy, son. I don't want trouble."

"You got it, though." Buck's handsome face was twisted with fury. "You got three seconds to apologize or draw."

The stranger picked up the glass again. "Well, then, I apologize. I'm purely sorry for anything I said that bothered you."

Buck was caught flatfooted. The drifter's expression of good-natured stupidity was completely convincing.

"Well, I don't know," Buck began uncertainly. Luke Snyder broke in.

"Come on, Buck. Let it be. He didn't mean anything."

"Well—."

"Now, that's the honest truth," the stranger added. "Here, have a drink on me."

He slid the bottle down toward Buck, keeping his right hand on the bar, far from his gun. Buck reached out automatically to field the bottle, his grin coming back.

"Well, then, I reckon—."

His voice trailed off, and the bottle slid past his outstretched fingers to smash on the floor. The stranger's left hand had moved like a striking rattler in a backhanded cross-draw. Buck stared into the muzzle of the old Star.

"I reckon you owe me a new bottle, son," the man said

easily. There was a strangled sound from Kyle, who stood like a statue with his gun still half in leather. The big man kept his eyes on Buck.

"If he draws, I'm apt to have to shoot you."

"Buck," Kyle said. "I can get him, Buck."

"Tell 'em to drop their gunbelts. You too."

"Easy there." Buck managed a smile into the stranger's cold eyes. "I'll buy you a fresh bottle. My credit's good here."

"Sorry, Buck." Luke Snyder folded his arms and stepped away. "Looks like your credit just gave out."

Buck shot a black look at Snyder, started to say something. The stranger spoke first.

"This hogleg's getting mighty heavy, boy. The gunbelts."

"I can get him, Buck," Kyle said again.

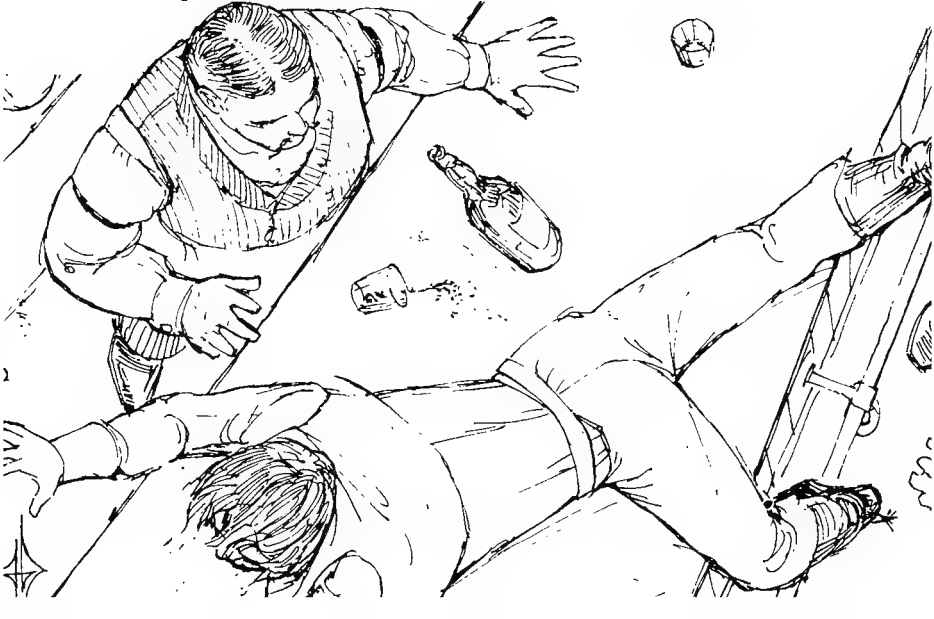
"Now, look, mister—" Buck began defiantly.

"The gunbelts. Now."

Buck looked for a moment at the stranger's gray eyes, then slowly unbuckled the belt. "Lafe, Kyle, drop your guns."

"Buck!" Kyle wailed.

"Drop 'em!"



The belts clattered to the floor. The big man lowered his .44, easing the hammer down.

"That's better," he said. "Barkeep, take care of these, will you?"

Snyder picked up the guns and retreated behind the bar. The stranger grinned at him.

"Reckon those'll pay part of your bill. If these boys don't mind."

"You can't take our irons," Buck protested, some of his bluster coming back. The stranger laid his own gun on the bar.

"Guess you're right, son. Here, take mine."

With a quick sweep of his hand, he sent the Star spinning to Buck. Buck forgot his astonishment as he pounced on the pistol and raised it, turning back toward the stranger. Then the stranger's big right fist caught him full in the middle of his triumphant grin. Buck dropped like a poled steer. The big man looked at Snyder and shrugged.

"Feller who falls for the same trick twice, he's a fool."

Then Lafe and Kyle came at him, and he whirled to meet them.

Afterward, Luke Snyder remembered it as the best fight he'd ever seen. The details weren't too clear, but it ended with the stranger mopping blood from his nose and mouth, and looking down at Lafe and Kyle. They were stretched peacefully beside Buck.

The stranger reached up and wiggled a tooth experimentally, then glanced at Snyder and the watching customers.

"Well, that was mighty hot work. You got a place in town where a man could get a bath?"

"You bet, Mister," the barber said, coming forward. "I'll open up my shop right now."

"Much obliged. Barkeep, take care of that bottle for me."

An excited buzz of conversation followed him into the street. Snyder sent a man to fetch Doc Barnes to see to the survivors, then set himself to polish glasses and listen. He was just finishing up when a sudden hush told him the stranger had returned. Snyder brought out a fresh bottle and set it on the bar.

"I been thinking," the stranger said. He was a lot cleaner and the beard was gone, but he still looked like trouble. "Maybe I ought to stay around awhile. What became of my three friends?"

"Two rode out when they woke up," Snyder said. "Doc said something about setting the other one's jaw. You thinking of settling here?"

"Well, I figure if those three whelps can tame this town, I can. You got a lawman here?"

"Sheriff Bannon. He's out of town."

The stranger's eyes narrowed. "Tom Bannon? From the Dakotas?"

"That's right," Snyder said in surprise. "You know him?"

"Yep. I guess I'll be riding, after all. I purely don't need trouble with him."

Somebody snickered. "Bannon didn't do much against those kids. I guess he ain't so tough."

"Yeah?" The stranger searched the crowd with his eyes. "This same thing happened up in Deadwood once. Bannon

asked for deputies to handle a couple of hardcases, and nobody would help. You know, he let those two almost wreck the place before he cracked down. Sure taught people a lesson."

He looked around the room.

"That wouldn't be what happened here, would it?"

No one answered. After a moment, the big man scooped up his bottle, threw Snyder a salute, and pushed out through the swinging doors. Snyder watched him mount his horse and ride out of town to the west.

It was morning before Tom Bannon turned up again. He pushed in through the saloon doors and leaned on the bar as Snyder was sweeping out the place.

"Morning, Luke. You know what's going on? People have been treating me like I'm nine feet tall."

"You missed all the excitement, Sheriff. You should have been here last night."

Bannon grimaced. "I was supposed to meet a feller out west of town. Bounty hunter. He wanted to stay out of sight so folks wouldn't know he was around these parts."

"Oh?" Snyder raised his eyebrows. "Friend of yours?"

"Well, I thought so." Bannon shook his head sadly. "I helped him out of a bad spot years ago, when he was just a punk kid, and he said he'd return the favor. I wrote to see if he'd be special deputy for a while, but last night he said he couldn't help. Too busy making money, I guess."

He shrugged, then looked at Snyder.

"Now, what was all this excitement that I missed?"

Luke Snyder took out a clean cloth and began polishing the glasses on the shelf behind the bar.

"Oh, nothing much, Tom. Buck Harmon and his bunch just decided to leave town. Real sudden-like, it seemed."

"Is that so?" Bannon's solemn face lighted up. "Now, is that so? Luke, it sure is funny how things work out sometimes."

Snyder carefully replaced a glass on the shelf and reached for another.

"Yes, sir, Sheriff," he said. "It surely is."

THE LADY AND THE LION

By S. Omar Barker

"Well, Shutup," I says, "what does *this* feller want, a pet gillygalloo bird?" "It ain't a feller," grunts Shutup Smith. He goes on reading, his lips wiggling. "It's a female." My callin' name is Tuck Short, and me and Shutup Smith sorter conjugate as pardners. Now what has started Shutup to gettin' letters is: Last year he went to town with the cattle, and somewhere amidst them dens of iniquity in Kansas City he met up with a dude who offered him fifty bucks to ship him a coyote pup for a pet. Shutup shipped him one all right, but not before the coyote had bit him in the leg which swole up till it looked like we might have to shoot him for the hydrophoby. Cost him sixty bucks for ol' Doc Offenblatt to cure it, so he lost ten on the deal.

But what I was fixin' to say when I interrupted myself, this K.C. dude was so tickled with his coyote that he passed the word to all his high-toned friends that if they wanted a live souvenir from the wilds of the West, all they had to do was write to Mr. Oswingo Smith of the Low Down M Ranch, Post Office Bullburg, N.M., and he would sure ship it to 'em alive and kickin,' same as he had the coyote.

From then on Shutup had been getting a slew of letters from K.C. and other eastern metrolopuses asking for everything from a setting of rattlesnake eggs to two dollars worth of what makes jack rabbits scratch. Shutup filled the snake order with magpie eggs, but the *pulgones* was the real article. Young Jinglefoot

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Johnson printed him a label to paste on the bottle for a trade mark:

JACK RABBIT FLEAS GARNTEED TO PLEASE!
THE OSWINGO SMITH SPECIALTY COMPANY.
WESTERN ANIMALS AND OTHER CRITTERS,
DEAD OR ALIVE. PRICES UNREASONABLE
BUT HIGH."

So now Shutup has got a letter from another one of the dude's *amigos* wanting some close-up pictures of a real mountain lion. Only this time it ain't male mail. It's from some high-toned heifer by the name of Miss Mercedes Gribble, and she don't want the panther portraits just sent to her—she wants to come out to New Mexico and take the photographs herownself.

Jinglefoot Johnson has fetched the letter out from Bullburg. He has been too polite to open and read it, but he has smelt of it a number of times on the way out. He ain't exactly in a total swoon when he arrives, but his nostrils look kinder flared and he's breathing purty hard.

"Shutup," he says, "if that heifer smells as good as her letter, you're goin' to need a chaperon!"

"A chaperoon for what?" I says.

"For the trip up in the mountains to photograph lions," says Jinglefoot, batting his big baby-blue eyes. "We can't allow a lily-pure puncher like Shutup to traipse off alone with a Kansas City sirene and no personal protection!"

"If you're figgerin' on hornin' in on the profits yourownself," avows Shutup, "you're sure lickin' the wrong spoon!"

"That's right, Jinglefoot," I says, "because there ain't goin' to be none!"

"Who the hell says there ain't?" inquires Shutup taking another sniff at the letter.

"I, me, your Uncle Tuck Short, Esquire," I tell him. "In the first place it takes an expert to hunt cattymounts with a go-bang much less with a kodak, an' all you know about the

critters is which end they wear their tails on. In the second place, you won't find none of them long-tailed pine pussies out here on the flats—an' all you know about mountains is how to misspell it. In the third place, we're too busy with fall roundup for any such gallivantin.' Besides, you ain't got no kodak!"

"Miss Gribble will furnish her own camera," retorts Shutup. "An' by the time there's enough snow in the mountains to track a lion, the roundup'll be all over. You reckon a hunderd dollars would be enough to charge her?"

"That depends," opines Jinglefoot, "on how young an' purty she is!"

"I'm too old of a buck-nun to be studyin' any on that," shrugs Shutup. "But I've heard that perfumed writin' paper ain't the fashion nowheres except among the idle rich. I'll charge her a hundered an' twenty-five an' she can fetch her own bedroll."

"Speakin' of bedrolls," offers Jinglefoot, "I don't never occupy but about half of mine."

"Shame on such talk!" I says.

Of course I know that's all it is. Jinglefoot is one of them right-livin', ranch-raised young buckaroosters that you'd prob'ly have to hogtie to get him within flirtin' range of a city gal, much less offer her half his bedroll.

"I believe I'll charge her a hunderd an' fifty," says Shutup, "includin' dog rent."

"Includin' which?"

"I read in a book," explains Shutup, "where all you got to do is sic a dog on the track of a mountain lion an' he'll run it up a tree for you."

"All *you* got to do—if you ain't a halfwit," I says, "is to git some pictures took of that ol' stuffed mountain lion in the Hoss-Tail Saloon an' ship 'em to this she-dude, charge her about five bucks apiece for 'em an' pocket the profit. Tell her this was the last live mountain lion ever seen in these parts, so no use her wastin' your time an' her money gallivantin' out here to look for one. Then you an' me can go ahead an' drift south again when the work's all done this fall."

But Shutup has got banker blood in his veins, with the other three-fourths mule.

"I might even charge her two hundred," he says, "an' she can bring her own tent. Jinglefoot, grab you a pencil and answer this letter for me before it cools off. I'm afraid if she seen *my* handwrite she'd figger I'm just some iggerunt ol' cowpoke."

"Well, ain't you?" I says.

"Not too iggerunt," says Shutup, "to grab easy money when it's flapped in my face!"

AROUND THE FIRST WEEK in November we can see a little snow topping the distant mountains. Shutup has closed his deal with the panther woman at two hundred and six dollars for a ten-day pack trip, unless she kodaks all the cattymounts she wants sooner. He borrows the boss's buckboard, and me and Jinglefoot ride in hossback with him to Bullburg to meet her train. Shutup stops so many places on the way to see if he can borrow a dog, that the train has done come and went when we get in. But anyways we've got a dog—a big old bony, blue-gray booger that Jinglefoot nicknames Methuselah on account of his wore-out teeth.

Setting on a wagonload of valises at the depot is a woman, and there looks to be a right smart of her.

"Looks to me," I says to Jinglefoot, "like they've had this'un on feed."

Jinglefoot kinder gulps. I've saw the same expression on a pup's face when you throw him a bone that turns out to be a stick.

"If that's the gal," he says, "I got to see a bartender about a bottle." And he rides away.

The well-fed female comes over towards where Shutup Smith is starting to climb out of the buckboard. She moves mighty freegaited for a two hunderd pounder. Instead of the kind of a dress we're used to seeing on she-stuff in these parts, she's got on a straddle-ridin' outfit made out of the same kind of goods that the Englishman owner of the YY outfit wears, and a little ol' dicky of a hat with a feather in it to match. Her hair looks to be about the color of a sorrel horse's tail dipped in a flour

barrel. Near as I can judge without toothin' her, I'd say she ain't a day under forty-four and not much over forty-five. (Shutup hisself is forty-six.)

Her apple dumplin' face sure wears a worried look.

"My name is Gribble," she tremulos to Shutup. "Are you by any chance Mr. Oswingo Smith?"

"In person," says Shutup, sorter looking her over for size. "Better knowed as "Shutup." It's a nickname I got from one time when I accident'ly got shut up in a nester's smoke-house. Yuh see, this nester—Egg Suckin' Shane, they called him—he had a daughter named Imogene that her an' me—"

"How interesting!" she busts in sweetly. "But suppose we proceed to load up and get to hell out of here!"

"Yes, Ma'am," gulps Shutup.

I can see by the way he's eyeing that pile of luggage and the size of his customer that he's wondering how the hell one little ol' buckboard is going to hold it all, not to mention the big stump-tailed blue dog he has borrowed from ol' Sotero Ulibarri on the way in. I expect he's also wondering where he's goin' to get a cowhoss stout enough to carry all that she-beef up a mountain.

"Lady madam," he said, "I was just thinkin'—I mean—well, kodakin' cattymounts ain't exactly no picnic in the park—not for a lady of your buxom build, anyway—I mean—if you was to take a notion to call the whole thing off, I wouldn't—"

"That's exactly what *I'd* like to do, buster," busts in Miss Gribble, but Mercey is determined to photograph a mountain lion, and of course I couldn't permit her to—to venture upon such an excursion with a *man* unchaperoned, so I felt obliged to come along and—"

"Huh?" says Shutup. "Ain't you Miss Mercedes Gribble?"

"Hell, no," says this fair fat female in that tremulous, timid sounding voice of hers. "I'm her Aunt Josephine! Mercy's in the station sending a telegram to her fiance. He's the one she wants the lion pictures for—to hang in his den after they're married. Mercy's the kind of a girl who—"

She don't need to tell us what kind of a gal her niece is, not in the looks department anyhow, because at that moment Miss Mercedes Gribble comes fairy-footin' out of the depot. She's a slim, high-headed heifer of medium height, with soft-lookin' curly hair about the color of sunshine on a sleek chestnut hoss, big brown eyes to match, and a pink and white face four times as purty as the purtiest of them cupid's-bait cuties they paint on high-toned calendars. Her open at the neck, copper-brown silk shirt and sleek gray ridin' britches don't do no good at all at disguisin' a she-stuff shape that just one look at makes even an ol' buck-nin like me wish to hell he was thirty years younger and had saved his wages.

"Oh, hello!" She smiles wide enough to take in me and my horse as well as Shutup and Methuselah. That smile makes us all old friends all in one wallop. "I'm sorry I kept you waiting!"

"The pleasure is all mine, Miss Gribble," beams Shutup.

I help him pile up their gear in the buckboard and loan him my lass rope to lash it down with, while the younger Miss Gribble climbs in, the buckboard sags like the back of a forty-year-old burro. Shutup has to set mighty narrow to make the front seat hold the three of them and the dog has to walk. But such is the charm of this Mercedes maiden's smile that ol' Shutup don't even grumble about none of it.

I'm purt near of a notion to go hunt up Jinglefoot to come see what he missed, but he's always so bashful around strange she-stuff that I kinder hate to.

We're caravanning slowly up Main Street when Jinglefoot comes out of Doc Waddenwich's drug store with a gal hanging onto his arm that I recognize as a big blonde waitress from the Hot Pot Cafe by the name of Rosanna Swensen. It has been rumored that Rosanna has wore out three husbands already and has got her trap set for Jinglefoot for number four.

Jinglefoot waves his free hand sorter casual-like at us, then stops as sudden as a balked mule when he sees the third party on the buckboard seat. Even at forty feet I can see his eyes bug out.

"Hey!" he croaks, like a man with his Adam's apple stuck. "HEY, SHUTUP! Hold up a minute!"

Shutup plumb ignores him. So do I, but the big blonde don't. She gives Jinglefoot's arm a yank and drags him back into the drug store, not very gentle, either.

"Well, my goodness!" exclaims Miss Gribble the younger.

"Just some drunk cowboy that his wife is havin' trouble herdin' home," shrugs Shutup and drives on.

About two miles out, Jinglefoot overtakes us in a hired livery stable buggy, leading his saddle horse behind it.

"Looks like you're kinder overloaded, podner," he said, familiar as a preacher at a taffy-pull. "I got room for one of your passengers, an' just happen to be goin' your way."

Shutup looks at Jinglefoot like he'd never laid eyes on him before. "Tuck," he asks me, "you know this brash young feller?"

"I can't seem to recollect him in person," I says. "But he looks a heap like that picture in the sheriff's office of a feller wanted over in Arizona for havin' too many wives."

"Pliggumy, I believe they call it," says Shutup. "What name you goin' by in these parts, stranger?"

"You know my name, durn you!" snorts Jinglefoot, red to the tops of his big ears. "I just figgered—"

"Aren't you," inquires Mercedes, "the drunk cowboy we saw having trouble with your wife in front of the drugstore?"

"Wife?" croaks Jinglefoot. "Godamighty, can't a man even—"

"Watch your language, stranger!" I bust in, laying a hand on my hogleg. "Remember there's ladies present!"

"An' I ain't aimin' to push neither one of 'em out to ride with no pliggamus stranger, neither!" declares Shutup. "Giddap!"

Jinglefoot follers us for about half a mile before he finally gives up and heads back towards Bullburg—with a rented rig to pay for and no gal to make it worth the money.

"He's a rather nice looking cowboy," says Mercedes Gribble.

"Are you sure he's really a polygamist?"

"If all the gals was as purty as you are, Miss Gribble," sighs Shutup, "I'd be tempted to be one of them pliggamists myownself!"

"You are a dear sweet man," smiles the gal, reaching acrost her Aunt to pat Shutup's horny hand. "Why don't you just call me 'Mercy'?"

"Mercy!" scolds Aunt Josephine. "I actually believe you'd flirt with Methuselah himself!"

Of course it's Shutup's age she is referring to, not the rented dog, but as Methuselah was the name Jinglefoot had give the pooch, her mention of it causes me to notice for the first time that our cattymount canine ain't with us no more, and I mention it to Shutup.

"Doggone!" he cusses. "You reckon he follered Jinglefoot back to town?"

"Jinglefoot?" inquires Aunt Josephine. "I thought you said you didn't know that young cowboy!"

"Lady-madam," lies Shutup, "Jinglefoot is just a cowboy sinner-name for pliggamist! Giddap!"

OF COURSE WE HAVE pertended not to know ol' Jinglefoot and accused him of being over-supplied with wives just for a joke, but it seems them dude women have took it serious. The next morning they're watching me and Shutup gear up saddle horses and pack mules for the trip to the mountains, when Jinglefoot comes strolling out to the saddle pen, face all washed, brand new duds and spurs a-jinglin'.

"Well!" exclaims Mercy. "*You* here again!"

"Yes, ma'am," says Jinglefoot, polite as a preacher pettin' a pup. "Will you marry me?"

"I presume," says Mercy, elevating her purty chin an extra inch, "that your other wives would have no objection?"

"Three of them won't," says Jinglefoot. "I can shoot the other two if I have to. Ain't love at first sight wonderful?"

"Back in Kansas City," the gal informs him, "we keep crazy people locked up!"

"Out here in New Mexico," grins Jinglefoot, "they take dudeens out lion huntin'. Say, does that ring on the purty third finger of your purty left hand mean by any chance that you're done spoke for?"

"That is correct," says the gal. "My fiance's name is Oswald Arbuthnot. He's a well-known wealthy bond broker of Kansas City."

"Mine's Horace Johnson," comes back Jinglefoot. Well-known healthy bronc broker of the Low Down M. Why don't you marry me and save yourself a trip back to K.C.?"

"Don't be ridiculous!"

"Well, you can't shoot a man for tryin'!"

"That depends some on what he's tryin'," I says.

"My dear young man," purrs Aunt Josephine, "it so happens that *I* am *not* engaged!"

"Uh—excuse me," gulps Jinglefoot. "I got to see a man about a dog!"

Which he proceeds to do. Shutup ain't wanted Jinglefoot to go along on the trip in the first place for fear he'll claim a share of the pay. Now he double-don't want him because, old and horse-warped as he is, it looks like Shutup is so smitten on this Mercy gal that he's jealous for fear Jinglefoot will get more attention from her than he does. But Jinglefoot has kinder got him between a rock and a hard place.

"Mr. Smith," he said, "of course I'm just a polygamous stranger around here, but it just happens that the hound you borrowed from ol' Sotero follered me back to town yesterday. In fact he taken up with me like I'd raised him from a pup. It also happens that I'm the only one that knows where he's at right at the moment. Invite me to go along on this panther-pasear, and you've got a dog to tree them lions with. Otherwise it looks to me like you ain't."

Shutup calls him a long-nosed, egg-suckin' kiote, but he knows when he's cornered.

"All right, flap-ears," he says finally, "wipe that iggerunt grin off your ugly mug an' git to packin' that ol' gray mule!"

One thing you can sure say for Jinglefoot Johnson, anything you put him at he sure makes a hand. Them Kansas City dudeens have brought along everything for plumb luxurious camping out except an iron bedstead and a china chamber pot, but with Jinglefoot helping us, we've got the packs on four overloaded jassacks all ready to head out for the mountains in less than an hour. It takes two men and a ladder to git Aunt Josephine aboard the stoutest cowhoss we've got. She sways his back considdable, but by travelling slow we figger he'll make it.

On account of he's got to go fetch the Methuselah dog from wherever he's hid him, Jinglefoot don't start out with the main caravan. We've been on the road about two hours when him and the dog ketch up with us. He rides right up alongside Mercy and starts sweet talkin' her in his bashful buckaroo way.

"You set a horse fairly neat for a dudeen," he tells her, "but as quick as I git the preacher paid after we're married, I'll see if I can't find a second-hand saddle that I can fix up to fit your purty south end a little better. Say, you frown awful fierce for a sugar-puddin' with such purty eyes!"

"Uncle Oswingo," she says, plumb ignoring Jinglefoot, "is it really necessary for this cowboy polygamist to accompany us?"

"Well," says Shutup, "I figger he'll come in handy to chop wood an' wash dishes an' put up tents an'—"

"In that case," she says, turning to Jinglefoot again, "you will have to dispose of that pistol you're wearing. We are going to photograph wild animals, not shot them. Oswald made me promise there would be no firearms carried on this excursion."

"That's what the lady said, Jinglefoot," I says. "Maybe we forgot to tell you."

"You sure as hell did," he shrugs. "But I ain't aimin' to shoot nothin' but a few rabbits for dog meat anyway—or a mountain lion if one threatens to claw this purty new gal of mine."

He reaches over to give Mercy's hand a loving pat, but gits his own slapped with the bridle reins instead.

"It might interest you to know that I am *not* your 'gal' as you call it. As I believe I told you before, my heart belongs to Oswald!"

"Try sweet-talkin me," busts in Aunt Josephine, "You great

big handsome wolf, you!"

Jinglefoot's ears get red, but he makes out like he don't hear her.

"If Oswald's such a woman-winnin' wonder-wolf," he says, "how come he lets a heart-bustin' heifer like you stray off his range?"

"Oswald is busy with business," says the gal, frosty as a January morning in Idaho. "Furthermore Oswald is a gentleman. He would never speak of a lady as a 'heifer'."

"Listen, sugar-bucket, if you're goin' to marry a cowboy, you'll have to git used to the way a cowboy talks. Gosh, you got purty eyes!"

"Never mind my eyes, blabber-mouth!" she flashes 'em at him. "What are you going to do about that pistol?"

"Shoot myself if you don't quit frownin' at me. Not that you don't frown purty, but—"

"If you're fixin' to shoot yourself," I bust in, "wait till we come to a good deep arroyo to throw you into an' save diggin' a hole!"

The upshoot of the hogleg argument is that instead of making him throw it away, Mercy just makes him empty it, tie the gun, cattridge belt and all up in a sack and put it in one of the packs.

"I promised Oswald there would be no shooting on this trip," she says. "Oswald doesn't believe in shooting *anything!*"

"Goody!" grins Jinglefoot. "That makes me feel a heap safer about stealin' his gal!"

"You do say the cutest things, Mr. Jinglefoot!" says Aunt Josephine. "How the hell do you keep the girls off of you?"

WE MAKE CAMP THAT night in the foothills. We pitch a tent for the she-stuff to boudoir in, but us buckaroos unspool our bedrolls al fresco, with the Methuselah dog curled up on the foot of Jinglefoot's. About midnight a couple of coyotes cut loose their falsetto fandango off about a quarter from camp. Of course coyote music don't disturb us cowhands none, but to them dude women it prob'ly sounds like sixteen he-devils with their tails in a crack.

Jinglefoot wakes up thinking ol' Methuselah is trying to crawl in with him. But it ain't the dog. It's a cotton flannel nightie full of Aunt Josephine.

"Oh, Mr. Jinglefoot!" she whimpers. "I—I'm so scared!"

"So am I," says Jinglefoot dryly, tugging his soogans down tight around him. "But not of the coyotes!"

"Auntie!" Mercy calls out. "You come right back in this tent this very instant!"

But she won't go till Jinglefoot and Shutup move their bedrolls over closer to the tent to keep the coyotes out.

We spend the next day battling brush, logs, trees, rocks and steep places in a noble effort to find out what's on the other side of a mountain—which turns out to be another mountain.

"My gosh!" complains Aunt Josephine as we go bustin' through the timber. "Isn't there a trail through this thicket?"

"There will be," I says, "by the time your knees and them mule packs git through knockin' down trees!"

"How soon," inquires Mercy, "will we start seeing the mountain lions?"

"Any time now," Shutup assures her. "Just keep your eyes peeled an' holler if you see one!"

Purty soon she hollers, but it's on account of a low tree limb dragging her off her horse, not from seeing a lion. Jinglefoot and Shutup bust down a lot of timber getting to her. Jinglefoot gets there first. It looks to me like he uses more of a hug bolt than necessary to help her up. He also brushes her off more places than the occasion calls for and boosts her back on her horse.

"Hereafter," Shutup tells him when we get strung out again, "your job's to tend to the pack mules. *I'll* look after the passengers!"

So the next one to get drug off is Aunt Josephine, and Jinglefoot lets him.

TO MAKE THIS LION TALE short with no kinks, we make camp in a canyon we don't even know the name of and for three days comb the roughest damn country the Lord ever set

up on edge and sprinkled snow on without producin' no panther-pussy for the gal to take a picture of, nor even any sign of one. All ol' Methuselah does is chase a few squirrels and get porcupine quills in his nose. And about all Jinglefoot and ol' Shutup do is try and crowd each other away from Miss Mercy, though it ain't long till I can see some signs of Shutup's romantic ideas wavering a little bit in another direction.

"Tuck," he tells me confidentially, "if that hefty ol' heifer was just about a hunderd pounds lighter on the hoof, I don't know but I'd about as soon marry her as the young 'un! That's awful expensive joolry she wears!"

"Shutup," I tell him, "the sooner we wind up this wildcat excursion, the sooner you an' me can head out south where we won't have to thaw our eyeballs every mornin' before we can see to put on our pants. Remember them buttered hotcakes that blonde boardin' house widder used to stack on your plate last winter down at Lordsburg? What's either of these delicate dudeens got that she ain't—besides sore knees from bumpin' trees?"

But Shutup seems determined to find a panther pussy for Oswald's gal if it takes all winter. Another day's hard riding over country that the Lord never carved out for horses nets us another zero. That night a scritch owl gets to scritching somewheres nearby. Aunt Josephine thinks it's a panther. She comes tearing out of the tent again looking for he-man protection. It's right embarrassing to a bashful young buckaroo like Jinglefoot, but him and Shutup finally herd her back in the tent, then build the fire up big to keep the boogers away. But the scritch owl not only keeps on scritching, it comes and lights on a tree right over camp and Methuselah gets to barking at it till nobody can't get to sleep.

I try pulling the soogans plumb up over my head, and about then the *bang-bang-bang* of three shots booms out through the frosty night. When I raise up, there's Shutup and Jinglefoot standing in the firelight in their longhandled you-know-what.

"I missed the so-and-so," says Shutup.

"Lemme take a pop at him," says Jinglefoot.

Shutup has just handed him the gun when Mercy steps out of the lady-tent into the firelight. I can't help noticing that she looks somewhat different in a cotton-flannel nightie than her Aunt Josephine did. I reckon Jinglefoot notices it too. He has just started taking aim at that scritch owl skylighted up in the top of a tree, but instead of shooting, he turns and stares at her.

"Scare a body to death!" scolds the gal. "Who did that shooting?"

"Honey *love!*" sighs Jinglefoot in that bashful way of his, "you better get to hell back in that tent before you freeze your purty little tootsies!"

"Never mind my tootsies, bowlegs!" says Mercy. "What are you doing with that pistol?"

"It ain't a pistol, sugar-babe," says Jinglefoot "It's a six-bang and I'm fixin' to shoot a damn scritch owl with it so you can enjoy sweet dreams of our future married life without no disturbance."

"Give it to me!" she says.

"Huh-uh!" says Jinglefoot. He misses the first shot but drops the owl out of the tree with the second. The gal pûrt near jumps out of her nightie at both shots.

"Wahoo!" hollers Aunt Josephine inside the tent. "Shoot 'em up, cowboy!"

"Mr. Johnson," begins Mercy, speaking purty firm considering her chattering teeth, "my orders were that there would be no shooting on this—"

"Honey *babe,*" busts in Jinglefoot, "you get back in that tent out of the cold before I have to carry you back!"

He throws the sixgun on his bedroll and starts towards her. She heads for the tent, ketches the toe of a moccasin on a stick and would of pitched on her purty snoot if ol' Jinglefoot don't jump over there right quick and ketch her. After he gets her up on her feet with an arm around her shoulder it looks to me like Jinglefoot ain't in near as big of a hurry for her to get back in the tent as he thought he was. But she slaps his face, tugs loose,

and dives into the tent, then pokes her head back out through the flap.

"Mr. Johnson," she says, "in view of your irresponsible behavior with firearms, you may consider yourself no longer a member of this expedition! Take your pistol and go on back to your sixteen wives!"

"Only five," says Jinglefoot. "You'll be number six."

Before the she-stuff is up the next morning Jinglefoot has done saddled up and throwed his roll on a pack mule and pulled out, pistol and all.

"Good riddance," says Shutup. "Now I won't have to cut him in on the profits. He didn't have no business shootin' off that gun noway."

"How about them three shots you taken at the owl yourownself?" I says.

"What that bossy little dudeen don't know won't hurt her," he shrugs. "An' don't you go blabbin' it to her or we're both liable not to collect a dime for the whole damn trip!"

"It's a good thing you ain't a she-wolf," I says. "You'd prob'ly skin your own pups and sell their hides for fur!"

THIS TIME SHUTUP has tied Methuselah to a tree so he won't foller Jinglefoot off, so we've still got us a cattymount dog—and three days later I'll be a horny toad's uncle if he don't tree something besides a squirrel. We hear him barking to beat all hell up above a long line of cliffs, and from the gawdamighty tone of it, I figure he's got him at least three lions cornered. But when we finally climb up there to him, it ain't nothin' but a big ol' spotted bobcat.

The cat lays stretched out on a limb about twenty feet up in one of three smallish pine trees out away from the main timber, his big green eyes looking down at us like he dared anybody to come up after him.

"Oh, isn't he adorable!" exclaims Mercy.

"Eat you alive if he got the chance!" says Aunt Josephine. "Let's get the hell out of here before he jumps on us!"

But Mercy decides she'll take some pictures of him. She

climbs up one of them trees about six feet from the one the bobcat is in, levels her kodak at him and begins snapping pictures.

"Poke him with a stick so you can git a picture of him snarling at you," says Shutup.

"Mercy! You let that monster alone!" quavers Aunt Josephine. "Come down out of that tree right this instant!"

"Go ahead! Poke him!" urges Shutup. "He won't hurt you!"

That gal up in the tree looks awful pale to me. But she busts off a dead limb and pokes the cat. He snarls at her and I can see her begin to shake. She pokes him again. This time the bobcat grabs the stick in his mouth. Mercy gives it a yank, the cat loses his balance and tumbles off the limb. He ketches himself halfway down, but evidently he's had all the picture taking he wants. Instead of running back up the tree, he gives a snarl and leaps to the ground. I reckon he was aiming to run hunt taller timber, but with ol' Methuselah bellerin' at his heels, he changes his mind and decides he'd better take to whatever tree is handy. And the tree he picks is the one with the gal in it.

"Wahoo!" hollers Aunt Josephine. Big as she is, she grabs holt of the first branch she can reach and starts up the tree after the cat.

"Sit tight, Mercy," she squalls. "Aunt Josie won't let the booger get you!"

"Keep calm!" hollers Shutup. "Ever'body keep calm!"

I reckon that bobcat coming up the tree towards her must of made Mercy Gribble a little nervous. She lets out a squeal and throws her kodak at him. The camera misses the cat and whams Aunt Josephine smack on the noggin.

I ain't exactly sure what happens except that Aunt Josephine drops out of that tree like a knocked apple, the bobcat right smack on top of her. At first I figger the *boom* I heard must be Aunt Josephine exploding when she hits the ground, but instead of falling apart, that heretofore timid chunk of Kansas City womanhood scrumbles to her feet with a hind leg holt on that bobcat, swings him a couple of whirls and flings him off

across the hillside just in time to wallop Jinglefoot Johnson across the middle.

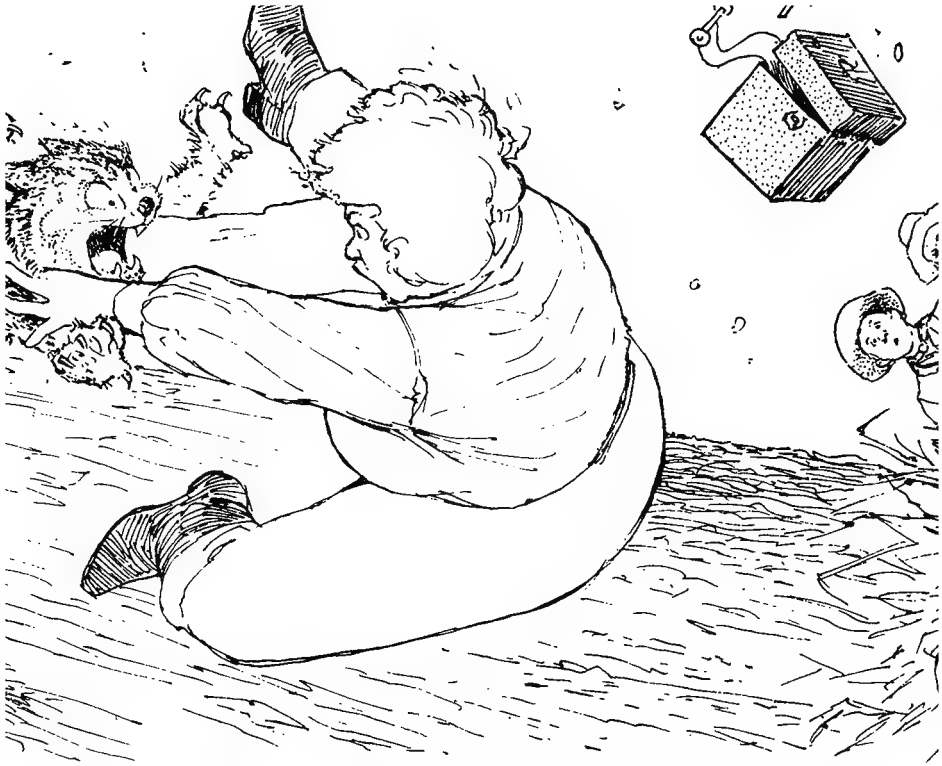
Then I perceive that the wildcat is already dead, and the boom I'd heard was ol' Jinglefoot's sixshooter putting a bullet in the cat's head just in time to save a couple of Kansas City cuties from getting the hell clawed out of them up in that tree.

Funny thing about it, up to now it's been Mercy that hasn't showed no sign of female timidity, and Aunt Josephine that's been scared spitless every time a coyote yelped. But now it's the young gal that's pale, white and whimperin' up in a tree top while Aunt Josephine looks like there's nothin' she'd like better than a few more wildcats to swing.

"What the hell did *you* have to shoot the booger for?" she demands of Jinglefoot. "Right when I had him where the hair was short!"

Jinglefoot is too busy hero-ing up the tree to bother answering Aunt Josie.

"Oh, Jinglefoot!" quavers Mercy. "If you hadn't shot it right



when you did, I tremble to think what might have happened!"

"Yeah, I know I'm a hero, honey pie," said Jinglefoot modestly. "But that ain't all. Quick as I get you down out of that tree, I've got somethin' to show you!"

Mercy don't ask him what it is. The only thing she seems to be interested in right now is somebody's manly neck to get her arms around, but Jinglefoot don't play it no more romantic than if he was rescuing a sack of beans.

"If I was thirty years younger an' had me a purty heifer up a tree," I remark, "I believe I'd make a leetle better use of my opportunities."

"Just keep your shirttail in, Uncle Tuck," he grins. "I'm skinnin' this wolf!"

He heists the gal onto his shoulder and comes backing down the tree with her, limb to limb like a trained raccoon backing down a ladder. As quick as he gets to terra firma he stands her on her own feet, picks up her kodak with one hand, grabs her hand with the other and starts dragging her off down the hill.

"Wiggle them purty legs, honey-toots!" he urges. "I seen an ol' mountain lion prowlin' them cliffs down yonder just a few minutes ago. If you want a picture of him to take back to Oswald, we'll have to hurry!"

The gal hurries all right. With all that cowboy muscle pulling her, she ain't got no other choice.

"Wahoo!" hollers Aunt Josephine. "Let's go catch us a cattymount!"

With her aholt of his shirt, Shutup ain't got no choice either, so I just foller along to see what's up.

Of course I don't know no more about mountain lions than a preacher does about poker, but my idea is that the racket we make bustin' down that loggy hillside would scare any mountain lion alive plumb out of the country. But it looks like I'm wrong.

All of a sudden we come out onto a little open bench about forty steps from rimrock, and yonder right smack at the edge of the cliff stands a mountain lion, big as life and twice as natural. He's got a curl in his tail, and although I can't hear it, he looks to be snarling at us.

"There he stands!" whispers Jinglefoot, pushing the kodak at the gal. "If you want a lion picture to take back to Oswald you better get a wiggle on before he takes to us!"

"Darn Oswald!" says Mercy. "I—I'm scared! Besides the kodak's busted!"

"Now if that ain't a hell of a note!" says Jinglefoot. "I wear myself to a frazzle findin' a lion for you—and you turn up with a busted kodak!"

"I—I don't care!" she whimpers. "I—I'm scared!"

"Wahoo!" squawls Aunt Josephine. "Watch me swing that ol' tomcat!"

She starts for the lion, Jinglefoot starts shooting, she hears them bullets whizzin' past her and stops. You can see Jinglefoot's first three shots sorter jar the panther, but he don't even uncurl his tail. At the fourth shot he totters and at the fifth tumbles over the cliff.

Me and Shutup rush down there and peek over the rim.

It's a two hundred foot drop with brush and slide-rock at the bottom. We not only can't see no panther, but it's also plain that nobody could ever get to him if we did.

"Well, Shutup," I says, "ol' Hoss-Tail Harrison's Hall of Joy-Juice won't never look the same. How much you reckon he'll try and squeeze out of us for it?"

"That's Jinglefoot's worry," shrugs Shutup. "It was his smart aleck idea."

"Speakin' of smart ideas," I says, "looky younder!"

For a bashful buckaroo with five wives, Jinglefoot Johnson seems to be doing purty good with the cutie from K.C. They are setting side by each on a log, and if she ain't got her purty head snuggled on his shoulder, my eyesight is mighty pore.

"Ah, sweet romance!" sighs Shutup. "If I'd only been jest a leetle big younger—"

"If it's romance you crave, podner," I bust in, "yonder sets another two hundred pounds off it, just a yearnin' for your manly arms around her!"

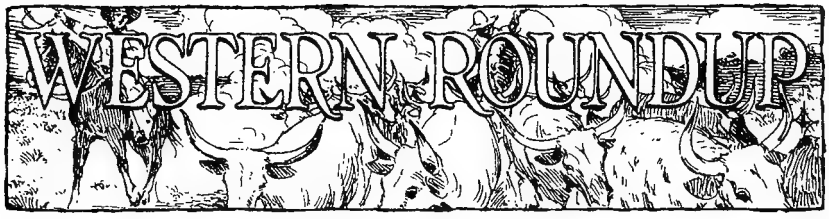
Shutup looks at me kinder wild-eyed, like a coyote caught in a corner and nowheres to run.

"Romance hell!" he says. "Didn't you see how rough that hefty old heifer handled that wildcat? Me, I'm goin' to the hosses—fast!"

Which he does, cutting wide around Aunt Josephine and taking to the timber like a shot-at wolf.

That was the last I see of Mr. Oswingo Smith till about two weeks later I overtake him setting up to a stack of that blonde widow's pancakes plumb down in Lordsburg. He don't even hit me for his share of the two hundred and some dollars them Gribble gals had forked over to pay for their panther pasear.

And it was a good thing he didn't, because after paying ol' Hoss-Tail Harrison fifty for the loss of his stuffed cattymount, and buying Aunt Josephine two bucks worth of ice cream sodies before heisting her on the train, I'd already gallantly give the rest of it to Mr. and Mrs. Horace Jinglefoot Johnson for a real ol' wampus-cat honeymoon!



Almost any school age child can tell you who Lewis and Clark were, and what they did. At least they can tell you about the expedition they made to the Pacific Ocean at the request of President Thomas Jefferson. There it seems, the stories of Lewis and Clark seem to end, although both led fascinating lives after their return from the far west. Meriwether Lewis died under mysterious circumstances in 1809 while travelling alone along the Natchez Trace. At the time of his death, he was thirty-five years old, and governor of the upper Louisiana Territory. The mystery of Lewis' death is closely examined in SUICIDE OR MURDER by Vardis Fisher ($2.95 soft bound) published by The Swallow Press, Chicago, Il. In this intriguing history, Fisher puts forth the argument that the debt-ridden Meriwether Lewis may have been murdered, rather than having committed suicide as has been put forward by other authors who have written about one of America's earliest explorers. Although it is unlikely that the real cause of Lewis' death will ever be truly known, Fisher makes a strong case for foul play, and provides the historian with some very interesting speculative reading.

Also on the subject of Lewis and Clark is Jerome O. Steffen's biography, WILLIAM CLARK—JEFFERSONIAN MAN ON THE FRONTIER. The book only briefly mentions the Pacific expedition, concentrating instead on the years 1807-1838, when Clark died at the age of sixty-eight. Much of the material in the book is claimed by the author, a history professor at the University of Oklahoma, to be previously unpublished. The book tells much about the civil career, military career and private life of Clark, and would make an excellent companion piece to Fisher's book on Lewis. Well researched and documented, with a thorough index, this book is neigh indispensable for the historian of America's early frontier.

Just arrived on our desk is a copy of Peter Watts' A DICTIONARY OF THE OLD WEST, a book crammed with the lingo and slang of cattlemen, frontiersmen, scouts, cowboys and others who abounded in the west from 1850 through the turn of the century. Laced with westernisms, this makes fascinating reading for western writers and readers alike. Some of the terms are common place, some obscure *(hard twist,* slang for manila hemp rope, as it was not as flexible as a rawhide riata). Illustrated, and written in lively style, it retails for $12.95 at bookstores, or from the publisher, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, NY.

In the same stack of mail that delivered A DICTIONARY OF THE OLD WEST came the latest offering from Time Life Books in their series of *The Old West.* THE MEXICAN WAR, with text by David Nevin is one of the best books on the subject that we have seen. Certainly for the budding historian it is an excellent place to begin a study of our war with Mexico in 1846, and for the more advanced scholar of the Mexican War the illustrations, which are second to none, make the book a sound investment. Well-edited and nicely designed, this volume brings to twenty-two the total number of books in the series. The price is $7.95 at your local book seller, or you may order the set from Time Life Books, Alexandria, VA.

If your interests are tied to the western film, then you will undoubtedly enjoy Diana Serra Cary's book, THE HOLLYWOOD POSSE. Chronicling the exploits of the cowboys who rode as extras in the westerns films made during the 30s and 40s, this book presents a picture of the Gower Gulch Gang that brings back many memories of saturday matinees with Tom Mix, Roy Rogers and the rest. If you like horses, cowboys and the movies, this book will provide you with some highly enjoyable summertime reading. Published by Houghton Mifflin in New York, it is priced at $8.95 at most book sellers.

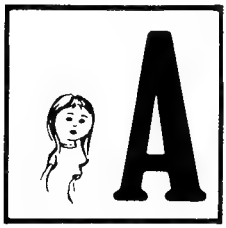
John Bianchi, president of Bianchi Leather Products, has announced plans for a new WESTERN MUSEUM to be opened in Temecula, California in the spring of next year. Already well under way, the museum will feature life size wax figures of famous western personalities, lawmen and desperados, along with numerous items either owned by them or associated with them. Bianchi's museum should be the finest of its type, and we look forward to this grand opening next year.

Original Buffalo Bill posters can run into some mighty big bucks—one broadside from one of the early shows recently sold at auction for over a grand—but fortunately for collectors of western memorabilia a fraction of that lofty cost will put copies of one hundred of these historical posters in your collection. 100 POSTERS OF BUFFALO BILL'S WILD WEST by Jack Rennert contains sixty-eight full color posters and thirty-two more reproduced in black and white bound into a 120 page book that measures 11x16 inches. The introduction goes into detail about the designers, and printers of each poster (including those done overseas for Cody's foreign tours) as well as following the show business career of America's first Ambassador of Good Will. An excellent book, it is priced at $8.95 soft cover, or $19.95 hardback. We suggest buying one of each, as you will surely want to frame some of the posters for display in your home or office.

WILDERNESS HOME

Not really in the Far West, the Seminole Wars of the 1830s nonetheless resulted in the first clear-cut victory of the Indian civilization over the encroaching whites. Historically neither the Seminole nor the settlers wanted war. All either side wanted was to be left alone, in their Wilderness Home.

By Larry Sutton



s Akin hesitated near the clearing, a shaft of moonlight slipped through the trees and outlined the troubled look on the old scout's gaunt face. Tim Carter had been traveling closely behind him, but now Tim stopped abruptly and watched Akin creep out into the open and sniff at the cold night air like an old buck sensing danger. Finally, Akin dropped down beside the boy.

"They ain't too far off," he said.

The old scout, silhouetted against the dark background of the scrub, resembled a scarecrow. The damp buckskin hung loosely around his small, bony frame. One long arm encircled a rifle at his side.

"Hadn't we better run for it?" Tim asked thinly.

Akin took his time answering questions. "That dumb Flint Hunter," he said absently. "I told him a month ago to bring his family nearer to the fort—that the Indians might cause trouble. But you got to admire a man for protecting his home."

Akin circled the large clearing quietly while Palmettos flapped noisily against Tim's legs.

The Hunter cabin sat boldly at the edge of the clearing.

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Through one of its small, shuttered openings light flowed out into the woods. Akin rapped softly on the door. Blowing out the whale oil lamp as he entered, he told Hunter, "Don't light it no more!"

Tim crept to a window and stared out at the silent woods while Akin and Hunter argued about the Indian's right to make trouble. He caught the scent of old lace curtains and freshly chopped pine. Homes all smelled the same, he thought.

"Those Injuns have no reason to bother my home," Hunter said.

"Yeah. But they got a right to live here, in Florida," Akin said. "It's *their* home."

"Well, it ain't me shipping them west," Hunter grumbled. "I ain't leaving!"

"If you want to get killed, then act like a fool. I plan to reach seventy-five unless the army shoots old scouts with bad tempers."

Tim glanced at them when they stopped talking. The woman had come up beside them so softly that he hadn't heard her. She stood there silently staring out at the woods.

The moon sat at the top of a pine as if it were propped in the sky. Tim tried too hard to see something move. A lump came to his throat. Sometimes, according to Akin, they waited until daybreak. Sometimes.

Tim had left his family safe inside Fort Brooke, Tampa Bay, early that afternoon. Tired of being cooped up at the fort, he had decided to catch Akin on the trail and demand to go along with him. He knew the old scout would be hesitant about letting him go if his mother and little sister (all the family he had since his father had died) were nearby.

He remembered Akin's surprise when they met. "You dadblamed fool!" Akin had said. "We're good friends, but I ain't risking no runaway teenager getting killed."

"I'm old enough to make up my own mind," Tim argued.

"At fifteen?" Akin snorted. "Grown, huh?"

Tim could never be sure when Akin was joking. "Old enough," he said.

So they had continued on with one of Akin's routine trips to warn the settlers. Akin had been making such trips since the military authorities were sure the Seminoles would fight rather than leave their Florida homeland by the first of the year. According to

the treaty of 1834, they were scheduled to load on ships at Fort Brooke, Tampa Bay, for the trip out west to Arkansas. But already angry bands, under a young chief called Osceola, roamed the countryside calling the treaty a white man's scheme to rid Florida of Indians. And the Army had sent a large detachment, under the command of Major Francis L. Dade, to reinforce the garrison at Fort King near the center of the state.

"They ain't cattle," Akin had said of the Seminoles. "They got rights."

Preoccupied with his thoughts, Tim had not seen the small girl come beside him. She looked pale and helpless in the darkness, reminding him of his own little sister back at the Fort.

"Mother says you came to help us," she said to Akin.

"Jenny!" the woman hissed.

"It's all right," Akin said. "Little ones need to talk."

The room was quiet now. Tim was counting the seconds until Akin thought of something to break the tension. It came sooner than he expected.

"I guess y'all are afraid of a few renegade Indians," Akin said. "Else the cat has got your tongues."

"Akin," Hunter blurted, "I wish you wouldn't pick on Jenny! She ain't in the best of health."

"Sorry," Akin said pleasantly. "Neither am I."

The night dragged on. Tim gradually sank into a deep sleep. When he awoke, he was surprised to see a faint trace of dawn in the east. Akin, he noticed, was still at the window, and he edged in beside the old scout to join the silent watch.

He was half dozing when the first one appeared. The Indian walked brazenly into the open. He was a tall Indian with a scar on his left cheek. His tunic was embraced with a red sash, and his leggings were edged in long thongs from his waist down to his ankles. Colorful handkerchiefs were knotted loosely around his neck. He wore the dress of a chief, but that wasn't unusual nowadays, Akin said.

"There's something familiar about him," Akin said. He whistled through his teeth. *"Kick-in-the-britches!* A long time ago I got into a knife fight with that one. He was young and inexperienced then, and, on the rolls, I just kicked him in the britches instead of slicing him. We called him Kick-in-the-britches after that, and he was

hopping mad about it, too. Come on," Akin said to Hunter, jabbing him awake, "let's go out to meet that Indian."

"You crazy, Akin!" Hunter grabbed for a rifle. Akin slapped it down.

"Listen, let me tell you a couple things," Akin said. "From now on I'll do the talking. I'd like to help save your family. A Seminole needs a reason for killing. This one is very proud, and he wants to show his people what rascals we really are. He'll wait for us to do some fool thing to give reason for killing."

Hunter's brown eyes showed no understanding. Akin looked hard at Tim. "I guess it's up to us, boy," he said. "Just remember—you asked for it."

The dawn had come swift and clear. Patches of white frost lay in the low pockets next to the bayhead. Tim followed Akin obediently; his fear gradually disappeared because of Akin's confidence.

When Hunter didn't keep up the pace, they stopped. Akin looked back at the big man as a farmer might at a disagreeable mule.

"It's important we don't act afraid," he said.

A second Indian riding a brown mare darted in from the woods. Akin patted his rifle, and from habit, the knife at his side. The quiver up his leg barely left the inside of his buckskins. Upon nearing the Indian leader, he looked at him and the name snapped to his mouth. "Kick-in-the-britches! . . . Nice to see you again."

"So you remember, Little Knife?" the Indian said in English. "Is the little white heart still so good with a knife?"

Others came up now, some on mounts and others on foot. Tim counted six near Hunter's log-floored pig pen. He then gazed at the dripping bay leaves and rolling, lumpy clouds against the blue sky. Akin had taught him that you always took time with Indians.

"I guess I'm as good as ever with this knife," Akin said. "I can still throw it twenty yards and split a cypress knee . . . I'm sorry the Seminole is being forced to go West."

"The Seminole is a very proud Indian," Akin continued. "Many moons ago I met this one when he was a boy." He pointed to the leader. "And it made him a very big man with a special name among the white man. He proved to be very brave. He kept fighting even though he could not win."

The Indians stared at Akin. Tim realized that Akin was taking advantage of something he saw in the Indian leader's face. He watched the old scout search the clouds for signs of rain.

"This Indian," Akin said finally, "is recognized by the American government as a leader in the Seminole nation!"

What an Indian didn't understand, he feared. Suddenly they were in a cluster, some sitting on the ground painting themselves with warpaint, paint kept in small sea shells. They had red faces with white streaks and white faces with red streaks. Some of them wolfed whisky as if it were Seminole *sofka* in the kettle.

It could happen any minute, Akin explained to Tim. Their only chance was to earn the Indians' respect and to keep groping for angles. Still, this was only delay. Hunter had grown too restless, and he might be the one to trigger it off.

"What do you think, boy?" Akin asked him point-blank.

At the moment Tim didn't fully understand the thought brewing in his mind. He had been staring at a large doll head mounted on the saddle horn of an Indian's horse. Probably from some settler's cabin, he thought. Nodding at it, he said, "Let's bring out the little girl."

"What?" Akin followed Tim's glance to the doll head. It's wide blue eyes stared blankly back at them. Akin's old eyes blinked several times, and then he walked to the house and came back with the girl. "It might work," he said. "It's worth a chance."

Little Jenny walked slowly toward the Indians. A breeze rippled her hair and her pale face looked to the Indians in awe.

"Please don't kill us," she said.

The rifle snapped upright in Akin's hands when Jenny approached the restless Indian on the horse to gaze at the doll head. All motion stopped. With all of them breathless, the Indian staggered from the horse and lowered his painted face next to Jenny's.

It beat all Tim could imagine. The Indian, probably the biggest of the bunch, yanked the doll head off the saddle horn and handed it gently to little Jenny.

"He lost a little girl in the last Indian war," the leader said to Akin. "He is proud of the little *Est-to-chee.*"

"We'll give one pig to you to show our respect," Akin said quickly.

The leader's face grew sad. "Soon they force the Seminole from his land to a barren land in the west. No more can he watch the sunrise over the palms and the pines. When our chiefs saw this western land, they reported it bad. We want all the pigs!"

Frowning, Akin glanced at Hunter and indicated that he would handle it. He knew just how far to go without appearing cowardly. He held up two fingers. "There is much meat on foot in the scrub for the Seminole. Would you take food from the mouth of a little girl?"

It seemed to be settled, for a moment. "We're shore glad you stopped by," Akin said, turning back to the cabin. He waited a second. "Take any two pigs you want."

"The *sow?*" Hunter gulped. "Akin, I need that sow!"

"Take that sow if you want it," Akin said to the Indian leader. "If you think you're that short of food . . . Maybe you got a little child like that one there, too?"

That did it. It was over for the Hunter family. The Indians grabbed two squealing male pigs from the pen and disappeared back inside the scrub.

"Whew!" Akin said. "Thank Tim for that!"

They tried to convince Hunter that he should move his family nearer the fort, but Hunter subbornly refused. "We're safe now," he said. "If anybody knows Indians, it's me."

"Shore," Akin grumbled. "And this time you're probably right."

Remembering that Christmas was two weeks off, Tim whittled some little hands out of soft pine for the doll. The woman worked nervously on a body.

They left after a noon meal. It wasn't good for an old scout, Akin said, to stay too long in this comfortable situation.

"God bless you," said the woman. "Come back soon to our home."

"We'll be back," Akin said flatly. He glanced at Tim. "Me and my partner."

The Reader's Choice

THE TOP 25 WESTERN FILMS

In the February issue of FAR WEST we published the Western Writers Of America's list of the Top Twenty Five western novels. This set wheels turning here at the FAR WEST offices, and it was decided to survey our readers and come up with a list of the twenty five most popular western films.

We make no claim that these are the best westerns ever filmed (although none of them could be rated anything less than excellent on any list of western films), just that you, our readers, have decided that these are your favorites.

For the statistically inclined, the actual list of "Best Films" ran to more than hundred entries, with the top twenty five being separated by fewer than a dozen or so votes.

Starting with the most popular, here are the TOP TWENTY FIVE WESTERN MOVIES:

STAGECOACH, The hands down favorite. If any film rates the title "classic" this is it. Released in 1939 this picture has all the elements a western needs. Directed by John Ford, the picture has an all star cast headed by John Wayne, Thomas Mitchell, John Carridine and Andy Devine. The story was taken from *Stage To Lordsburg*, a Saturday Evening Post western written by Ernest Haycocks. Without a doubt this one is worth staying up to eleven o'clock to watch on the late movie.

Next was the **PLAINSMAN**, a Cecil B. DeMille blockbuster starring Gary Cooper and Jean Arthur as Wild Bill Hickok and Calamity Jane. The film includes everything from the close of the Civil War to Wild Bill's death at the hands of Jack McColl in Deadwood, South Dakota in 1876. For sheer western entertainment is hard to beat.

DESTRY RIDES AGAIN, with Jimmy Stewart and Marlene Deitrich takes a look at the son of a famous western lawman who tries, by peaceful means to tame a town gone wild.

MY DARLIN' CLEMENTINE casts a Henry Fonda as Wyatt Earp, and follows his exploits leading to the confrontation between the Earps and the Clanton gang in the famous shoot out at the OK Corral. Interestingly enough, director Howard Hawks met the real Wyatt Earp several years before the filming of MY DARLIN' CLEMENTINE and discussed the now famous shootout with the legendary western lawman. Earp's own version of what happened was faithfully transferred to the screen when Hawks did the picture a decade later.

SHE WORE A YELLOW RIBBON is definately one of the best cavalry pictures ever made. It contains the three things most necessary for an exciting western picture; horses, John Wayne and horses.

RED RIVER, another John Wayne Film follows the building of a cattle empire in post Civil War Texas. Outstanding performances by John Wayne and Montgomery Clift make this worth watching any time. This is also one of the Duke's favorite films, as he wears a belt buckle with the Red River brand in almost every film he has made since then.

CAT BALLOU with Lee Marvin and Jane Fonda has to be the funniest western ever made. Marvin's dual characterizations of an alcoholic outlaw and silver-nosed desperado are only up staged by his hung-over horse.

FORT APACHE with John Wayne provides a very good look at soldiering in Arizona in the 1870s. One of the best cavalry pictures, with lots of action.

THE SEARCHERS teams John Wayne with Robert Wagner in a search for a little girl stolen by Indians. Natalie Wood plays the missing girl, in what is probably one of John Wayne's finest films.

THE SHOOTIST, Glendon Swarthout's outstanding novel about a dying gunfighter was brought to life on the screen by John Wayne, Maureen O'Hara and Ron Howard, with a guest appearance by Jimmy Stewart. A superior film in every respect, and John Wayne's most recent western.

UNION PACIFIC, another biggie by Cecil B. DeMille, done in 1939 with Joel McCrea and Barbara Stanwyck. A true epic, it traces the laying of the steel ribbons across the prairie. Excellent acting, historically very correct in detail, with lots of action.

BUFFALO BILL with Joel McCrea as the last of the Great Scouts. Not 100% true to the life of Buffalo Bill, but the film captures the spirit of the man and the times he lived in. Following his career from the plains of Nebraska to the show rings of the world, BUFFALO BILL is an absolutely top flight flim.

ANNIE OAKLEY, one of the stars of Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders of The World, has been the subject of several films, but none better than this 1940 classic starring Barbara Stanwyck as Little Miss Sure Shot.

THEY DIED WITH THEIR BOOTS ON, is the film that comes the closest to capturing the character of George A. Custer, who, along with a portion of his personal command, was wiped out along the Little Big Horn River in 1876. Errol Flynn as Custer combines horsemanship and dashing good looks to present an excellent portrayal of the "Boy General" of Civil War fame.

VIVA VILLA! with Wallace Berry was a real surprise. Undoubtedly a good picture, we would have thought that *Bad Bascombe* or *Jackass Mail* would have been up ahead of this excellent portrayal of one of Mexico's revolutionary leaders. But after watching VIVA VILLA! we have to agree, it is vintage Wallace Berry, and a super film.

THE CULPEPPER CATTLE COMPANY is one of the very best westerns ever made. In western film circles it has become something of a cult film, and many regard it as the most realistic western ever filmed. Its worth staying up to 2AM to watch this one on TV.

JEREMIAH JOHNSON with Robert Redford is an exciting look at the life of mountain man Liver Eatin' Johnson, who in the 1850s waged a one man war against the Crow Indians.

THE OX-BOW INCIDENT starring Henry Fonda and Dana Andrews was the first (in 1942) of the new wave of "adult" westerns that dealt with non-traditional themes. Directed by William Wellman, THE OX-BOW INCIDENT a quite film that portrays the frontier in its proper perspective. A critical success when released, it was never a big financial money maker. Perhaps the events of WWII and the dramatic content of the film (the lynching of three innocent men suspected of murder and rustling) conspired to keep it out of the big money league.

McCABE & MRS. MILLER is a non-traditional western that provides the viewer with a look at the characters who peopled the real west, evoking sympathy and understanding for characters rarely considered in western literature. Warren Beatty does an outstanding job as McCabe, a tinhorn gambler, while Mrs. Miller, a soiled dove, is portrayed with understanding by Julie Christie.

THE HORSE SOLDIERS, with John Wayne follows the hard riding cavalry, with the Duke supported by some of the best riders to come out of Gower Gulch.

TRUE GRIT by Charles Portis won John Wayne an Oscar for his portrayal of Rooster Cogburn, U.S. Marshal. A superb performance by John Wayne, and a film every western film buff should see.

LITTLE BIG MAN written by Thomas Berger and brought to the screen by Arthur Penn and starring Dustin Hoffman takes a scathing look at the old west through the eyes of 121-year-old Jack Crabb, as he recalls the characters he knew on the frontier in his youth. Often funny, the film has a sweep to it that makes it enjoyable as we follow Crabbs (Dustin Hoffman) exploits from early youth (captured by Indians) through the closing of the frontier.

RIO GRANDE with John Wayne, Maureen O'Hara, Harry Carey, Jr. Victor McLaughlin and Ben Johnson. Incredible riding on the part of Ben Johnson, and a well drawn, well acted story. As one of our readers wrote in, "the only thing wrong with this picture is that it isn't in color."

THE STALKING MOON with Gregory Peck is a suspenseful, although involved, western yarn about a woman who has escaped from Indians with her small half-breed son. Rescued by the Army, Peck is assigned to take her to relatives waiting nearby. On the way they are trailed by a renegade Indian, father of the boy the woman is taking with her to the east. An excellent film.

MONTY WALSH starring Lee Marvin as an end of the line Cowboy was twenty fifth on our readers list of the best westerns, and certainly ranks as one of the better westerns made in the last decade.

A lot of films that might have rated TOP TWENTY FIVE on some lists didn't make it on ours; HIGH NOON (27) and SHANE (31) were close. BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE SUNDANCE KID came in at 40 while BAD COMPANY brought up the tail at 100, having received only two votes. Films receiving only a single vote weren't counted. The worst film voted for as a western? MIDNIGHT COWBOY, although we think the sender was probably joking.

The Conclusion Of

THE TAKING OF A RANCH

By V. A. GLOVER

As a boy Juan Delano's parents were murdered and he was sent from his native Mexico north with a drifter known as Jake Muffins. The years passed and Juan grew into a man, determined to avenge the death of his parents at the hands of his viscious uncle, Perez. Now, at the hacienda of Perez, Juan and Jake have attempted to assert Juans birthright to the vast fortunes held by his uncle. Fighting with Pereze's hired killer Diaz, Jake has been knocked unconscious and tossed into a dungeon, while Juan has disappeared.

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CHAPTER 10

Juan rode into camp about four hours after Jake rode out. The fact that the older man was not there did not immediately bother Juan. Perhaps he was on a hunt. Or maybe the man was just scouting around.

When Jake did not show several hours later he began to worry some. He'd not really thought about Jake being concerned enough about him to ride out looking for him. But he knew now that such must have been the case. A shame crept over Juan as he realized the affection the old man had for him that moved him to fret over him.

Swiftly Juan rode out of camp in the direction of the ranch. It would upset his timing and his plans, but he must look for Jake. The wind tore at his sombrero held by a slender finger of hide about his neck. He leaned into the wind.

In a few hours he was at the ranch. Juan had scouted the grounds well. He knew of the garden entrance but felt that it offered too much opportunity for ambush. Juan's thoughts went to the roof. There was where he would make his entrance.

He chose the most unlikely of places. There were three places on the roof he could enter from, and of the three he chose the most difficult. In fact, it was such an impossible looking place that Perez had not even considered it as likely, even though he had taken the precaution to have the other places watched.

At the far edge of the house stood a large tree. Its branches stretched wide, reaching far out near the roof top but not quite over it. The nearest branch was a good ten feet to just the edge of the roof. The drop to the roof was only about four feet so the leap to the roof had to be almost a horizontal one. And to complete the impossibility of such an undertaking the roof itself posed the final and greatest difficulty. Its pitch was great and the slick tile prevented any kind of grip. Anyone able to land on that roof would only slide off.

Only a madman would consider trying such a thing. But Juan was not a madman, nor was he a fool. All of the dangers had presented themselves to his agile mind almost immediately. Juan was aware of the difficulty of the task. It only made him the more eager. He'd chosen this place to enter soon after he'd declared his intentions to his uncle. He hadn't planned to use it this soon but that was of no importance now.

Juan climbed to the lofty branches of the tree. He gazed about him at the serenity below. There was nothing stirring on the grounds. His gaze took in the reddish, smooth roof. The distance seemed much greater from here than from on the ground. The challenge of the moment set his muscles to quivering. He forced himself to relax. It would not do to waste energy before it was needed. The leap was going to require all his agility as well as all of his strength.

Reaching into his blousy shirt, the type worn by the peons, he withdrew a small pouch. He pulled the strings apart and put his left hand into the pouch. Out came a gooey substance clinging to his fingertips. It was pine sap. There were many bleeding pines around the camp and Juan had procured a pouchful.

He removed the moccasins from his feet and smeared his feet liberally with the sap. Most of it he put on his toes and on the balls of his feet. He rubbed some all over his arms and his left hand. On the right hand he put sap only on the fingertips. There might come a need for that hand soon.

Juan inched his way along the limb that hung far out. This would be where he would make his daring leap. He set himself, careful not to rub any of the sap off. He was going to have to overcome the dip and sway of the branch when he jumped.

Juan did not think about it long. To think was to lose courage. He leaped into space with a short grunt. The branch had cut down his distance tremendously. He clawed the air grimly, hitting the roof seconds after the jump. He barely made it. But what mattered was that he was there and ten mules would not drag him off now.

He lay his upper body flat to the roof, palms flush on the

tiles. His tail was humped high as his feet gripped the roof surface surely. After he was sure of his position he began inching himself forward, heading for a place where two roof sections joined. Once there it would be a simple matter to work his way to the section of roof he had in mind.

He soon came to the attic window. He had to break in, but the noise was slight and went unnoticed, carried away on the wind. He lifted the window and slipped inside the roomy attic. The musty smell was thick and heavy. He made a face of distaste.

He wiped the fingers of his right hand, the gum rolling off easily, and began a search in his pockets for a match. There was none to be found. One cannot think of everything, he thought philosophically. He'd left the matches in his blanket roll. So, he cat-footed aorund for several minutes until he found a door.

It led to a bedroom with the look of long disuse. The smell of age and enclosement was in the room. The door of the bedroom led out into a small, narrow hall. Juan picked up on the door as it threatened to creak. He bellied down as he went into the hall, a dim light showing at one end. Juan crept in that direction.

It turned into a small, half-walled balcony with a slender staircase leading down into another larger balcony. Behind that balcony were rooms. Below was the huge entrance room, a sort of a majestic ballroom. He moved slowly down until he spotted the guards sitting around on the balcony. Uncle was taking no chances.

He went back down the hall and deeper into the darkness past the doorway where he'd just exited. The hall led around the room, almost to the middle, following the shape of the large room. There in the middle Juan encountered a door. It was unlocked so Juan stepped cautiously through it.

Something struck him almost immediately with the force of a plunging horse. Arms of immense strength encircled his body, hands searching for the throat. A musky smell of an unwashed body assailed his nostrils while greasy hair ground into his face.

Juan had stumbled into the lair of Matzui the Apache!

It would be debatable as to who was the most surprised. The Indian, weary from the chase with Jake, had been sleeping. The slight sound of the opening door sent him catapulting through the air at the intruder with savageness and fury.

It was well for Juan that the Indian had been asleep. Had he been awake, time would have offered the chance to use a weapon. As it happened, the Apache, upon awakening and seeing a figure advancing upon him, thought he was being attacked. He'd flung himself headlong at the unknown intruder without taking time to draw a knife at his waist. Juan, though slender, was possessed of a wiry, rope-like strength. But he had something else besides. In times of danger something seemed to possess him. It filled his being with a fire, a madness; his brain went wild and a strength flowed through him that would test even the ponderous thews of Jake Muffins.

He reacted to the attack by pushing a cupped hand against the chin of the Indian and giving a mighty shove. The head snapped back and Matzui let go lest his neck be broken. He melted into the darkness of the room.

Juan followed. The fury that claimed him was subsiding now, leaving him clear to think. He'd broken that torturous grip from his body and now he had to kill or be killed. His knife was held just in front of the body, moving in lazy side movements, searching for an encounter with anything solid.

Matzui, amazed and somewhat chagrined that he'd been forced away so quickly, had retreated quickly to the wall opposite the door. He could see Juan advancing upon him and the steel of the knife gleaming with reflected light seeping from behind the curtained window. His own knife was held in a fist waiting.

The Indian was in his own element. He had not uttered a sound, liking the contest. He cared little for the identity of the intruder, though he guessed it was the kinsman of his master.

Juan, adjusted to the dim light because of being in the

darkened hall, could see his enemy fairly clear, standing silent awaiting the engagement of death. The fire was in Juan's eyes and the blood coursed through his veins giving him an exhilarated feeling. His lips were parted, the white of his teeth gleaming wetly. He stopped only a few feet before the Indian.

Matzui struck first. He whipped the knife forward and to the left, then moved back as suddenly as he'd leaned forward. He was testing the mettle of his foe. But the knife cut through the air only for Juan had shifted his body and struck hard for the arm that flickered in the dark with its pointed piece of death.

Juan missed too. The Indian was expert, wise in the art of knife fighting. The youth backed slowly as the Indian now came out to meet him. They both stopped as if by common accord in the very center of the room. Here there was room to manuever.

In a situation like this, with two who are deadly in the use of a blade, it becomes a case of who gets lucky, who makes the first mistake, or, if one wants to gamble, who takes the chance that breaks the tie and severs the deadlock. The gamble meant either instant victory or instant death.

Juan was thinking fast. The Indian was too good, too fast for him to expect that he could dispatch the man without receiving wounds himself. He had to go for broke, take the chance. To fence with this man would be to invite eventual death.

Matzui struck again, this time making a slender red streak across Juan's belly. If he'd sucked it in only a fraction of an inch less it might have all been over. But the savage had paid for it. Juan had followed that with an attack of his own even while the Indian was making his sweep for Juan's belly. His knife slashed across one arm of the Indian but it was not a very serious wound.

Juan waited for another attack. He was going to risk everything to his coordination and speed. If he failed, if his timing was a fraction off, if his speed was not that of a striking rattler, then he was done. Matzui would make short work of him.

Viciously, the Indian struck, this time going low, sweeping

for Juan's legs. Matzui leaped back, knife held ready for the expected counterattack. But Juan did not follow the Indian with the quick slashing motion Matzui had expected. Instead, Juan had thrown himself on the floor at the very feet of the Indian, rolling once so that he was on his back.

Surprised, the Indian tried to leap over Juan but fell when Juan grabbed an ankle. The boy stretched out far and found the twisting body of the Indian as it was falling. The knife sank to the hilt in the side.

Juan, knowing he'd dealt a mortal wound, yet careful, knowing this kind of fighter does not quit being dangerous until dead, moved back into the shadows. Still there was no sound from Matzui.

Suddenly the Indian gave a loud yell and plunged through the darkness at Juan. Knowing he was dying he was going to try and take his enemy with him. Juan, instead of falling away, fell forward, rolled quickly and stabbed upwards. He felt wetness as the blade met resistance. Juan cried out as Matzui's blade also met resistance in his calf. It was minor, but stung.

And then it was all over. Juan had found a vital place in the Indian's body once more. Matzui relaxed in death, his knife falling to the floor. Juan pulled himself free of the Indian and let the body fall to the floor. He felt weak and exhausted.
dian and let the body fall to the floor. He felt weak and exhausted.

He stumbled to the bed, tore off a piece of dirty blanket and tied up the minor wound in his left calf. Juan fell across the bed and was instantly asleep. The little sleep he'd received during the week, plus the leap to the roof and now the energy-draining fight with Matzui had finally caved him in. He was as still as the body on the floor.

CHAPTER 11

Jake lay on a small pile of cracked and very brittle straw. His whole shoulder ached where Diaz had plunged the knife in

but he'd been able to stop the flow of blood. His head throbbed as well, but it was not in the big man to dwell on his hurts.

He'd been in the small underground room for most of a day and nearly the entire night. Dawn would be coming soon although he'd not see it, and perhaps never. But he wasn't thinking of that. Jake's mind was groping for a way of escape. He wasn't the kind to quit, ever.

He swung his whiskered face around, surveying his new home. There was a cot on the dirt floor but the bottom had been split and was useless. Or was it? Jake crawled over near the wooden-framed cot. He grinned at the thoughts that coursed through his mind as he considered the possibilities of certain parts of the cot. He coughed, almost choked, then hacked out a huge glob of spit and blood, mostly the latter.

Jake stood up warily, still not sure of his ability to do much of anything. He ached and throbbed with pain in so many different parts of his body that he couldn't really tell if anything was seriously wrong or not. His whole left side was soggy with blood.

Reaching down he took hold of the cot and shook it. It practically fell apart in his hands. The dampness had rotted the wood. The grin that had been trying to make itself permanent suddenly dissolved. No brains would splatter using that wood. Then another idea suggested itself. He began to work on the new idea.

In the meantime, Diaz was only a few feet above, in the large sitting room. It was early and the little man was pacing back and forth. His entire being was taken up in the anticipated torture of the big gringo below. He was planning the torture step by step, as though he were a general about to undertake a war. He even planned his words, how he would say them and when. Diaz wanted this man to die a hundred times. He would bring this old man to the point of groveling. Yes, that was what he really wanted. He wanted this giant to lay at his feet and grovel before him.

The black, smooth-looking eyes glistened with anticipation as he hastened from the room. He stopped long enough to get a squat, powerful-looking Mexican to help in the task of tying the gringo to the stakes. Diaz would dismiss him then. Such things as this needed to be savored alone.

Together they descended the narrow, damp stone stairs. A torch flickered in the guard's hand. Diaz followed, his face grimacing in distaste at the smell of the sooty torch. In a moment they were at the door of the small room where Jake had been tossed some hours earlier.

The guard swung the heavy iron door open. The groan and screech echoed against the walls, an ugly sound. Diaz stepped in first, the guard close behind. It is to Diaz's credit that only by an uncanny quickness did he escape that thrown object, that slivered piece of wood Jake hurled violently at the shadowy figure entering the door. Instead, the piece of wood whipped by his shoulder. The little man was drawing his revolver as he fell.

Another man, a lesser man perhaps, in Jake's place, would have been finished with that one attempt. But Jake Muffins had set too many beaver traps to rest easy with one. He'd expected to score a hit with that toss but the beating he'd taken had robbed him of some of his strength.

Just as Diaz was about to fire, something struck him in the face, bursting upon impact. He howled with pain as small particles from the thrown object got in his eyes. And then the bottom of a huge foot caught him alongside the head and everything went black.

Jake, meantime, was very busy. He'd prepared two balls of dirt, compacted by spittle. One he'd thrown at Diaz, the other he'd tried to hurl at the guard but had nearly been brained instead. The powerful Mexican, having no other weapon than the torch he was holding, had swung at the head that was only now turning towards him. Jake jumped back, the flames swooshing by him so close they singed his hair.

With a wild yell, animal-sounding and guttural, he launched himself at the guard. They came together in the dancing, wildly flickering light of the dropped torch. The huge Mexican bent and grabbed Jake by the knees, his intention being to toss the big man as far away as he could.

Instead he suddenly found himself picked up, two rough hands gripping the fatty flesh at his sides. Jake lifted the man until his buttocks were near shoulder level. Before the man could hit him in the groin Jake began keeing the man around the head. When the fellow let go of Jake's knees, the big man heaved him against the open door. There was no movement.

Jake went over to the torch, picked it up and then went to the little gunman lying in a corner, blood trickling out of his nose. Satisfied that the man was really out he relieved him of his pistol. He dragged the guard inside the door and left him against one wall. Then he sat down to gather his strength. He wasn't in much shape to fight his way out yet.

Pretty good for an old codger, he thought. The grin came back and soon plans for getting out of this fight were forming in his mind. He pondered the problem of what to do with the men in the room. To leave them here was not so good an idea. Jake was of an old school that said the only good snake was a dead one, the only good Injun a dead Injun. To his way of thinking, these fellows just might turn up to torment him later on if he let them live.

But there was a problem. It wasn't that he minded killing them as they lay there unconscious but rather, how to kill them was the problem. He didn't dare fire a shot. He could break their necks but that was such a messy and somehow unattractive thing that he rejected it immediately. If he'd had a knife there would have been no hesitation. Why that was acceptable to him and not the other he didn't know for sure. All he knew was that he couldn't do the one.

Finally, sighing partly with resignation, partly in disgust at his weakness, he walked to the door. He peered at the forms for a full minute, still torn with the desire to eliminate his

enemy. Then, torch in hand, he swung the heavy door shut. He hoped it stayed that way for a long time. That little man lying so still in there gave him a chill like no other ever did. First chance Jake knew he was going to have to take care of the man in a proper manner, which meant blowing him apart with his greener or hanging him. It'd be a decent way however he did it, Jake promised himself.

He cat-footed up the stairs, the gun he took from Diaz in one hand, the torch in the other. He moved the door open slowly and peered out. His troubled gaze rested on men slouching and sitting all around the room. It looked to be impossible to get out of the place. But he had to try. Even if he died in the attempt he knew he was going to try and make it. They'd know they had cornered an old he-coon before he was done.

First of all, he had to create a diversion some way. He couldn't just walk out there. He crept back down the stairs and to the little room. Jake took the key still hanging in the lock, muttering at himself for being such a fool for forgetting to remove it. He unlocked the door and swung the door open.

"Don't a soul move in this hole or I'll put a chunk of lead into what's movin," he announced. Jake moved in slowly, not taking any chances. Diaz was still in the same position, still unconscious. The other man was sitting, staring into the flame-lit face near the door.

"You! Get your carcass over here!" Jake demanded. "Vamoose!"

The Mexican stood and walked slowly to the waiting Jake. The big man took him outside and then closed the door. He asked the man, "You know English?" The man nodded. Jake grinned. "Before this is over you'll wish you didn't," he promised.

Jake shoved the barrel of the gun under the man's nose. He cocked it and then said, "Do you want to die, amigo?"

The man swallowed hard and answered softly, his voice quivering with fear, "No, senor."

"Then all you have to do is exactly as I say." Jake shoved the

gun out of sight in his shirt. He kept his hand on the gun. "Now, you and I are going out there. I can get this gun out quicker than you can run, so think about that before you do any squallin' for help. I may die, but you'll be right there beside me. You understand? Comprende, eh?"

Only too well did the man understand. He also understood that if he escaped his life would be worth nothing. If the mad dog Diaz did not settle it with him then his patron, Senor Perez, would surely have him shot. But there was certain death standing there before him. His nerves were threatening to send his body into a mass of quivering flesh.

Jake said, "Now you just act natural. If you don't calm down I'm just going to have to shoot you anyway. You ain't no use to me if they can see you're plain scared to death of me."

The man calmed and they went up the stairs. "Now remember, you're takin' me out of here, I ain't takin' you. If anybody asks where you're going tell them you're to take me outside for Diaz."

They opened the door and Jake stumbled out, clutching at his stomach as if in pain. The guard, with death certain right here and only probable in the future, decided to make it work. He murmured some angry-sounding words at his supposed prisoner.

One of the guards ambled their way, intercepting. He was smiling at the bloody sight before him. "Where do you take this piece of dog flesh, Gordo?" he asked, still smiling.

Gordo snarled at the other, "If you are so anxious to know why don't you ask Diaz? The gringo is his plaything, you know."

The man smirked, mumbled an imprecation having to do with Gordo's relations, and went back to his post. The two continued through the room without interruption. As they neared the doorway the three men posted there gave them a close inspection, but no suspicion was in their eyes. Jake stumbled into the early sunshine, wanting desperately to grin and holler just as loud as he could. If he lived to be a hundred he vowed he'd

never again be put into a hole under the ground. He'd made them kill him first.

Once outside the absence of any guards was very conspicuous. They were still trying to trap Juan, using the same technique they'd used to get Jake. He moved in the direction of the stalls. He knew from experience how far he'd get on foot. There was no one to stop them at the stalls. It was going better than Jake had hoped for. He'd thought to have a little trouble here.

Jake took time to saddle his own horse, which they'd apparently discovered munching grass somewhere nearby. He made the other man ride bareback. Soon they were at the gate.

"Hey Gordo! Why do you ride without a saddle and the gringo sets in one?" The voice of one of the guards at the gate rang out and caused Jake's heart to sink within him.

Gordo, equal to the occasion, answered, "The Senor says I am getting too fat and that I must relieve the horse of some weight by riding without a saddle. It is his way to joke." His face wrinkled with displeasure to show his feelings for the poor joke.

It worked. The sounds of laughter followed them through the gate and no one even bothered to question where they were going or why. Jake let himself grin now. And later he let out the yell of joy at being free that had been held in.

CHAPTER 12

In the upper reaches of the house Juan was just coming out of his deep slumber. He'd moved about as much as the Indian on the floor. He rose and peered out the window. It was dark and he had no idea how long he'd slept. As refreshed as he felt, he guessed it to be near the dawning hour.

Juan slipped through the door and moved silently down the narrow staircase. At the bottom he came to a door. Even before he opened the door he knew where he was. It struck him that

he'd seen this door often as a child, only it had been from the other side. The door led to the kitchen.

Just as he was about to ease the door open a voice filtered through the door. It was adamant, but pleading, "But we have been on guard all night, fat one!"

Another voice answered, "But I cannot give you anything. It is not permitted and besides I must fix the Senor's breakfast. I am late already!"

The other's voice lost its note of pleading and changed to a threatening hiss, "If you do not give us some of that meat you have hanging in there some meat will be missing from your bones one of these nights!"

A groan sounded from the fat cook. "Take it, dogs!" he muttered angrily. "And pray your theft is not discovered or we will all be hanging on a hook."

The other walked to the large meat door, yanked it open and grabbed several small pieces of cooked meat hanging in the locker. He clutched it to his chest and left, no words of thanks or smile of gratitude given. He neglected to even close the door after him.

Manuel, the cook, waddled to the door to close it. Someone else closed it for him. That someone was Juan. Manuel stepped back, mouth open, fear deep and shock displayed on his dark, rounded features. He knew who this was and further, he knew the story of the gunfight with Madero.

Juan spoke, "Keep your tongue, large one. If I am discovered I will make certain that you die with me." Juan motioned to a chair near the edge of the room. Manuel practically ran to the chair.

Juan said, "Where does the Senor take his meal?"

Manuel's eyes grew large and round with horror at the thought of what he guessed Juan must be planning. He fumbled with the buttons on his shirt, then whimpered, "Don Perez would give me to Matzui, the Apache, to play with if I told you that or if I helped you in any way. You must not ask me to help you."

Juan drew his knife and held it under Manuel's nose. He nodded to the little door leading up to the Indian's room and said, "I came from there, fat one. Who do you think I met in that room at the top? And who do you think is now lying there on the floor in his own blood?"

"You have killed Matzui?" he asked, disbelief ringing in his voice.

"I have done just that. Now, would you care to bleed on this floor or to do as I say?"

The cook uttered a groan of reluctance and said, "In his chamber. I take it there always."

"What is your name?" asked Juan.

The man answered and Juan said, "Well, Manuel, you are going to serve my uncle as always. But today, you are going to have a helper."

The fat cook trembled in fear at the prospect of leading this enemy into his master's chambers. His eyes closed as he visualized the scene. Juan reached out and touched him on the shoulder.

"Look at me, Manuel!" he commanded. The man obeyed. "You will not be harmed by me or by my uncle. But if you fail or betray me I shall cut your heart out!" To make his point Juan clutched the shirt front of the cook in a fist and drew the man forward. Juan's knife point rested under the man's chin.

Manuel stopped his trembling long enough to reply, "Si, I will help you."

Juan added, "You will have to play a part. I will carry the trays behind you. Berate me, scold me a little to make it appear that you are training a new houseboy or some such thing.

"If you do not play your part well you know who will die first, eh, Manuel?"

Manuel nodded. Juan looked about at the vast quantities of foods available. He grinned and said, "Whatever you are fixing for my uncle, fix another portion for me, will you?"

The Mexican scurried about the room. Already he was late

and would have to hurry to get the meal to the Senor in time. It took him less than an hour to prepare the meals. It took Juan a fraction of that time to devour his portion. Then he donned a large, white, servant's mozo, pulled his hair forward onto his head and scooped up the tray. They hurried out the door and ran full into the arms of one of the guards.

"Hey, Manuel, let me have some meat, eh? I am nearly dead of hunger," the man entreated. Noticing Juan, he asked sharply, "Who are you?"

Before Juan could answer, Manuel, with a surprising show of courage, or desperation, spoke up, "He is the new houseboy and a worthless one at that." The fat man reached out and twisted a lock of Juan's hair and pulled rudely. "Come along, you lazy pup. Manuel will teach you how to serve the Senor."

They left the guard standing there gazing after them. By the time they reached the stairs, the fellow, taking Manuel's absence of protest, as well as his absence, as a sign of assent concerning his proposed raid on the meat locker, hurried into the kitchen.

They mounted the stairs, Juan carrying the steaming tray laden with the breakfast, Manuel grunting along just ahead. There was no resistance or challenges given.

It took another minute to walk down the guarded balcony to Perez's room. Once they were stopped by a sharp-eyed vaquero looking hard at Juan, then allowed to pass on. There were no questions, just a close scrutiny.

As they came to the door, Manuel, knowing his life depended upon the acceptance of Juan, spoke sharply to him, "Be careful you do not trip, donkey, or I will have you whipped." Juan nodded submissively.

The cook rapped sharply on the massive door. A question came from within.

"It is Manuel with your breakfast, Senor."

"Bring it in then. Will you let it get cold, stupido?" Perez's words were muffled but unmistakable.

Manuel swung the door open, entered, making sure he closed the door after Juan. Perez was seated on the edge of a pon-

derous bed, looking out the large, cathedral-shaped window.

"Put the food on the dressing table, Manuel."

Juan, nodding Manuel into a far corner, walked over to the table just to the front of Perez. He sat the tray down and stood, leaning slightly, eyes fixed on his uncle's face. As yet the man had taken no notice of either of the men.

Perez was the sort of man who took several hours to awaken. He usually sat on the edge of his bed somewhat befuddled, clearing the cobwebs from his mind, for most of an hour. Then he breakfasted. After that he dressed, by then being fully alert and able to face the day.

"Good morning, Uncle," greeted Juan cheerfully.

Probably it was the first time the man had ever awakened and come completely alert, wide-eyed and flushed in such a short space in his life. It was a matter of seconds and he was off the edge of the bed, red diffusing his face, his eyes blinking rapidly. He choked, trying to say something.

Juan, grinning with pleasure and enjoyment, said, "Surprised to see me, Uncle?"

Perez was regaining his composure. He glanced over to the far corner of the room where Manuel cowered, trembling with fear. Perez, lip curled in contempt, snarled, "You ingrate, hound! You have earned your death for this betrayal."

Manuel started to protest but Juan cut in. "He only did what he was forced to do. To do other than I wanted him to do would have been to die by my hand. You will do nothing to him, I will see to that."

Perez looked at Juan. The mockery in Juan's eyes was highlighted by the fire dancing in them. That the boy could have simply walked by a score of armed men was almost unbelievable.

"And how will you save that dog's life when you are not able to save your own? It will be a different matter to walk out of here now that you have entered."

"You are not very bright in the mornings, are you, Uncle? Are you not able to understand the fact that you are my pris-

oner, my hostage? I will go as I please, with you, of course."

"You would threaten your own blood?" asked Perez.

Juan laughed. "You are really something, Uncle. Do not try and speak to me of blood ties. I despise hypocrisy."

"If you will leave now I will promise you a safe exit," Perez ventured.

"You bore me, Uncle. I have no time to waste." Juan turned to Manuel and said, "Manuel, you will walk just to the left of the Senor. And you," he said to Perez, "will go ahead of me. If there is trouble you will die one second before I do."

"Surely you do not think to walk before all the men. That is too risky," pleaded Perez.

Juan chuckled softly. "Does it bother you to be paraded before your men, captured by a mere boy? I hope so. I really hope so."

Perez grew red of face as his anger rose in him. "You will pay dearly for this, Juan," he threatened.

"You have promised that already," Juan said. "Why go on with such meaningless and wasteful words? You do not even know yet that I will let you live."

The thought had not really occurred to Perez. It was obvious from the little twitch of surprise in the man's eyes. Now, as he studied the youth before him he saw something he'd not noticed before. This boy, turned man, could kill without flinching. It was told by the set of the head, the look in the eye that he gave back to his uncle. Yes, this youth would kill if he had to. Perez shivered for the first time since falling into his nephew's hands.

They went through the door, Juan bringing up the rear. His pistol rested in the holster under his arm. If all went well there would be no alarm taken. If there were, he relied upon his ability to draw the weapon and place the muzzle against his uncle's skull before any action could take place.

But no challenge came. In fact, the place seemed almost deserted. The men who had gone to hunt left a big gap in his uncle's force. One man nodded at Perez and was rewarded with

a sneer. That was not out of character for his uncle so the guard took little, if any, notice of it.

They stopped near the kitchen and Juan asked, "Where is your pet snake, Uncle?"

Perez shrugged, resigned to the turn of events. "Probably he is with your unfortunate gringo friend, pulling a finger off or gouging an eye out." He smiled at the quick look of horror that leaped into Juan's eyes.

"Take me to him! Now!" The curl of Juan's lip and the tone of his voice told Perez that this was no time to do anything but comply with the demand. To do otherwise was to invite death.

"He is down in the small dungeon. We can get there from that room." Perez pointed to a small room just off the main hall.

Juan had been assuming that Jake was either in one of the villages or hiding somewhere nearby. He had not allowed himself to even consider seriously that the big man had gotten captured. The news that he was in a cell being tortured by that snake Diaz sent Juan into a determined frenzy.

"Move!" he commanded. They hurried to the little room, Juan shoving Perez along.

As they descended the narrow stairs Juan heard a voice. He stopped and asked, "Who is that?"

"That is Diaz. Only he would be down here at this hour," answered Perez.

"Then you will all be very quiet. Your life depends upon it." Juan paused, then added, "Do not think to warn him, Uncle. I will not bargain for my friend's life. He has taught me that much. I know that your word would be worthless." The warning was given in hushed tones, the hard glitter in Juan's eyes lending itself to the moment, promising death.

When they reached the bottom Juan motioned Manuel and Perez to one side. Cautiously, he peered into the narrow slit in the door. There was only an inky darkness. Why would Diaz be in there without light? Something was not right. He moved to his uncle's side.

"Call him," he whispered. "Ask him to come out here for a moment."

Perez cleared his throat softly, then, somewhat nervously, he said, "Diaz! Are you there? Come here, man. It is important that I see you."

A groan of dismay and rage sounded, then, "Fool! I am locked in here!"

Juan whispered, "Ask him about the gringo."

A short silence greeted this question; then Diaz, in better control of himself, replied, "He escaped. Since you are not aware of this fact he probably walked out right before your sleepy eyes."

Perez leaned heavily against the wall. Things were coming too fast for him. He'd received a shock at the sight of his nephew in his very bedroom. Now, his most trusted and reliable man was totally helpless. He shook his head slowly.

Juan's soft, silvery laughter filled the small chamber. It grew as the startled voice from the cell cried out with surprise, then changed to one of sheer rage. Juan called to Diaz, "You are where you belong, Diaz. All rats belong in a hole. Is this not so?"

Diaz could not speak, so great was his anger. First the escape of the hated gringo, then this pup standing, laughing at him. The voice called to him again, "The old man, he was too much man for you, eh, Diaz? You should watch yourself. Instead of fighting old men you had better go back to fighting old women, or perhaps children." Juan paused, then added, "Or you could go back to cutting throats of sleeping, defenseless people." Juan's voice had lost its lilt. It was low and deadly sounding.

Diaz snarled. "So you know about that, huh? Well, I'm glad for that."

Juan chuckled but there was no mirth, "You will have cause to remember those words and you will regret them, I promise you."

Juan turned to his uncle and said, "When we return to your chambers I want you to call a certain hombre in . . ." he

stopped, turned to Manuel and asked, "What was that fellow's name who took meat from you?"

Manuel answered, "He is called Gonzales."

Juan grinned and continued, "I want you to call him in and tell him that you know he and the rest of the men have been stealing meat from the meat room. When he is frightened enough then you will tell him that he is to inform all of the men that they are to go out and hunt for the rest of the week. They are to replace what they have eaten and when they return tell him that you will have thought up another severe punishment for them all."

In a moment the chosen man was summoned. He poked his head in the door hesitantly, a sinking feeling in his stomach telling him that indeed his wildest fears were realized, for there sat the Senor. And it was to the kitchen he was called. Manuel stood in a corner looking very innocent of all. Gonzales gave him a dark look as he entered.

Perez began, "You are a filthy meat stealer, Gonzales." The man gulped but said nothing. "You have committed a serious crime. And not only you but all of those jackals out there have, for they shared the meat with you." Perez was showing real anger now, for the knowledge that his meat locker had been violated by a grubby, dirty, foul-smelling peon drove him.

The man ventured an excuse, "Senor, we were starving. It was a very long night without food."

"That is no excuse!" Perez then explained to the man what his punishment would be. As he did so the man tried to hide the joy that came to his eyes by looking away. He would not die, after all. His back was not to feel the lash. When Perez got to the part about returning for more punishment the thought of not returning was obviously being considered as the man stood there.

Juan stood by silently. He knew the men would be gone in a matter of minutes. The ranch was his. Like a ripe plum, he'd taken it. It only remained for him to discuss the details with his uncle. It is unfortunate that Juan forgot about fat Manuel.

CHAPTER 13

Jake headed for the little village where Juan and he had stayed when they first entered the area. He knew he could count on getting some attention to his wounds and that he would be safe enough for the moment. Jake let the big Mexican ride ahead where he could watch him. He turned him loose after he'd finished this ranch-taking business.

It took Jake and his former guard nearly a day to reach the village. The children greeted Jake enthusiastically, examining his wounds, milling about, questioning him in rapid-fire Spanish. Jake, grinning with pleasure at being made over, spun a tale that began with his fighting off at least thirty men and being captured only after he ran out of ammunition. The kids took it all in without a flicker of an eye, nothing doubted.

Gordo stood by uncomfortably, not really knowing what to do. He had persuaded the big man not to leave him off, promising to behave himself. He had no desire to return to the ranch for he knew what Diaz would do to him. And if that little weasel didn't do for him, he knew for certain that the Senor would.

"Hey, you tube of butter! Git over here and tell this little hombre who ain't been out in this here world as many years as I got teeth that what I said is so."

Jake was hollering at Gordo to verify the fact that he'd whipped him and Diaz at the same time without any guns or knives. They'd been willing to believe the thirty men and all the rest, but that even he could take the feared and malo hombre Diaz, and with such a huge one to help him too, was more than they could take.

Gordo walked over, glad to enter this thing for he did not like being excluded. And too, he was fast becoming a big fan of the large gringo. This man was the only man ever to beat Gordo in a fair fight. Only one other time had Gordo been bested and that was because the man had clobbered him with a spittoon and knocked him unconscious.

He reached the little gathering. Jake grabbed him by an arm and said, "Now ain't what I told the honest truth?"

Gordo nodded slowly, "Si, you did all that and more. With the speed of a cat," he began, looking at all the brown faces before him," the big gringo struck. Diaz, he was frightened so badly that he fainted. Before he did though he said that I, Gordo, must fight this devil, and that if anyone could best him it would be me." The faces were all screwed up with excited interest now.

Jake scratched his head. What Gordo was saying was all right, he guessed, but somehow it wasn't quite what he'd wanted. The fat man continued, "The gringo Jake came at me like a hungry lion after a calf. I struck him so hard that the club in my hand burst in pieces and still he came on. Then I grabbed him, thinking to throw him into the wall. He lifted me up," Gordo was raising his hands as though he held a man in them, "and threw me instead. I flew many feet in the air and when I hit the door it fell off. I got to my feet and . . ."

"And then he fell back down cause I punched him in the mouth like I'm about to do now if he don't shut up," Jake interrupted, his face lined with distrust and some chagrin at the other's glib tongue.

Gordo grinned and backed away. The children clamored for more but Jake begged off, showing them his wounds and asking for some hot water and bandages. A dozen ran off in several directions, each anxious to bring back what the giant wanted. Jake settled back against the trees, contented. Maybe he could convince Juan to settle for being the mayor of the village, he thought idly.

Some miles away Juan was in the process of becoming a candidate for a firing squad. He's succeeded in getting most of the men away from the house and the grounds, but there had been one little slipup. There was something he hadn't thought of and it was about to cost him . . . perhaps cost him his life. It would be touch and go at best.

He'd trusted to Manuel's fear and that was his downfall.

True, the fat cook feared Juan, but what Juan did not know was the absolute terror he held for Diaz. And Perez ran a close second. The man could not conceive of the little gunman not getting out of the prison somehow. When he did he would remember that Manuel was there while the young man was laughing at Diaz. When Perez told Diaz that it was he who had led young Juan to his room, then there would be a need for a cook soon after. He didn't want to end up in that little room underground with Diaz running a knife around his body. He couldn't even bear to think about it.

Manuel had scurried down to the dungeon with a key he knew was hanging in the Senor's room. Better that he, Manuel, be the one to let Diaz out, thereby earning the man's gratitude. In a moment, the deed was done. Diaz scarcely paused as he rushed from the cell.

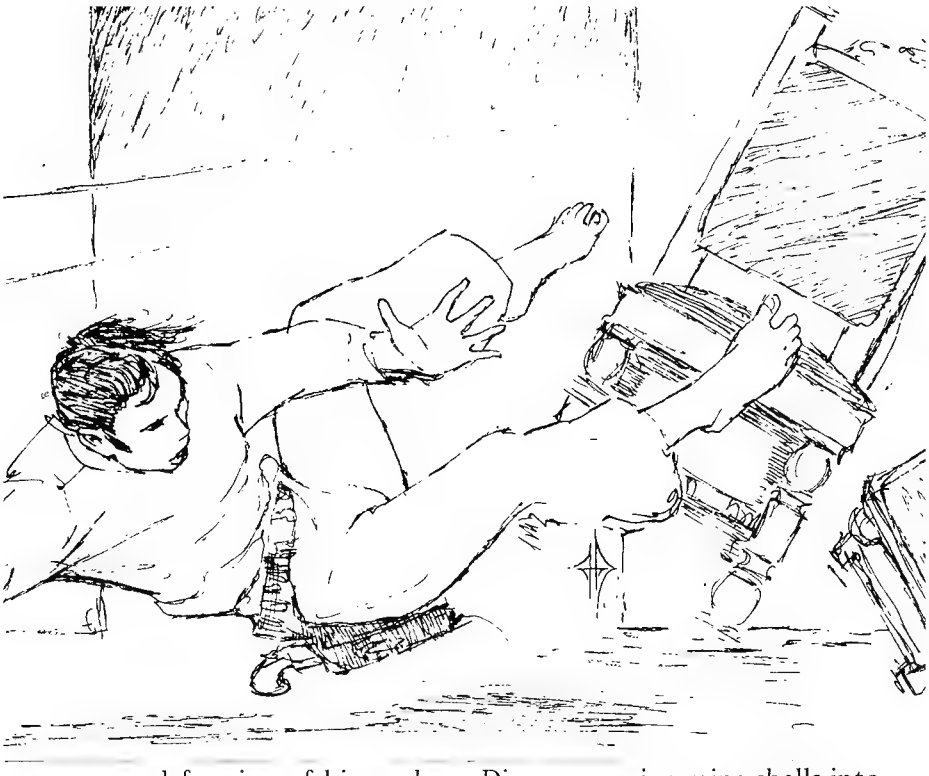
The only thing that had saved young Juan's life was because Diaz had been for so long underground and away from the bright sun that he was not able to hit the mark—the mark being the back of Juan's head. The bullet clipped a small piece of Juan's ear off instead.

Juan flung himself off the porch where he'd been sitting with his uncle, discussing the ranch. Perez had conceded defeat and was answering all of Juan's questions without hesitation. It was only in exchange for his life.

Now, things had turned about suddenly. With a snarl Perez leaped aside to get out of the way. He rolled off the porch away from Juan. He saw the youth disappear into the brush amid the rapid firing of a gun. The body did not appear hit.

Juan was desperate. He knew it was useless to try and reach a horse so he did the first thing that came into his head. It was instinctive, that something that comes up in a man trying to survive. He did not take conscious thought about a plan but rather headed for what something inside told him was the safest place around at the moment. Juan doubled and went straight for the house.

Perez picked himself up off the ground, looking carefully



around for sign of his nephew. Diaz ran up, jamming shells into the smoking gun and muttering as he blinked and squinted, "I missed him! I missed the little whelp!"

Perez smiled and said, "He can't get far. I'll go and get my pistol and you alert the guards at the gate, if there are any left! And fetch Joe and Paco over by the south wall. They were told to stay there even if they heard shooting, so they won't have moved."

Diaz nodded and ran off toward the gate. Perez turned and went back into the house. He breathed deep as the thought came to him that once more he was in possession of all this, that he still retained it all. He'd never appreciated it all before Juan. He'd always owe Juan that.

In a few moments the grounds were being searched carefully. But there was no sign of the youth. Diaz sent one of the men after the group of hunters who by now would be looking for everything but game. They went back to the task of looking for Juan.

Finally, Diaz stomped into the house. "He isn't out there," he stated flatly.

"Did you ride about on the plain?"

Diaz retorted, "Certainly we did! I suspect your loving nephew is right in this house somewhere, laughing at us."

Perez considered this. The longer he thought about it the more sense it made to him. Certainly! That is the logical place to hide. He turned and looked about him, thoughtful.

"Where would you suppose him to be in here? There are many rooms."

Diaz thought a minute, then answered, "Wherever it is I am sure there will be two ways into it. He will not corner himself."

"Good! Then we look in the best places and we have him." Perez glowed still from the joy at having the return of his ranch presented from thin air.

Meanwhile, Juan lay on a foul-smelling blanket in the upper reaches of the house. Once more he was in the room of Matzui, the Apache. But the Indian was no longer there. Juan had rolled

him out the window and onto the roof. It had taken much effort but he'd accomplished the task.

He adjusted himself to be more comfortable. Rest was important to him right now for he did not know what the night held. He knew that eventually they'd deduce that he was hiding in the house somewhere. Also, they'd get around to wondering where the Indian was and Manuel would likely tell them of the death of the Indian. He was sure they'd investigate. But until then he'd rest easy.

Late that night the thought of Matzui came across the mind of Perez. He scowled and asked Diaz, "Where is that stinking Indian? Off on another one of his visits with his people, I suppose. When you need him he is not around."

Now, it perchanced that Manuel was serving the two men coffee with some cakes of meal. He started as though struck, remembering, and then suddenly fearful because he hadn't thought to tell them of what he had heard.

He looked at Perez. "Matzui is dead," he offered.

Diaz jerked, spilling some of his coffee. "What did you say!" he demanded.

Apologetic, Manuel stammered, "I . . . uh, you see . . . that is I . . . I heard that it was so."

Perez asked, "And how did you come to hear this? Who killed the Apache? Did he fall in water or something?" Perez laughed at his own joke.

Manuel said, "It was the young Juan who told me. He entered the house by way of the Apache's room while he was sleeping there. There was a fight and he was killed."

Diaz smirked, "And you believe that? Are you fool enough to believe that a boy could do such a thing? Perhaps to a child but not to one like that Indian." His lip curled with contempt for the story.

Perez laughed. "I do think you hold my nephew a bit under. He is more the wolf than you think."

Diaz's eyes narrowed. "I know what he is and what he can do. But that thing he cannot do. There is one way to find out

if it is true." Perez turned to Manuel. "How long has he been up there dead?" Looking quickly at Diaz he added, "If he is dead."

Manuel answered, "Since last night, I believe." The men stood and walked out of the room. Perez, in high spirits, said, "Well, at least he can't stink any the worse. I never smelled any stink worse than that Indian."

They went to the kitchen and just as they were about to open the door, Diaz stopped them. He said, "You know, we have searched almost everywhere but up there for him. Wait for five minutes and then go up." He turned from them and hurried away.

Perez called after him, "Where are you going?" Diaz smiled wickedly and answered, "To wait for your nephew."

CHAPTER 14

Juan heard them, though they were as quiet as they could manage. He had been listening for them, knew certainly they would eventually get around to looking for him in this place. Softly he rose from the bed and eased the door leading down the dark passageway. Then he slipped back to the bed, stepped on it and went out the window.

Juan crawled along the side of the roof until he discovered a place he could jump. He'd descended from roof to roof until he'd gained a section covering the rearward part. This section was low. As there were few guards now it would not be likely that anyone was watching this place.

Juan hit the ground softly, landing gracefully, maintaining his balance. As he was about to rise a mocking voice drifted out of the darkness to him.

"Well, well. The little bird has come to land." Diaz's voice was unmistakable.

Juan was silent, knowing that to move was to die. Diaz continued, "Did you really think that you would outsmart me? Really, it was like the wolf playing a game with the calf. There was no chance for you, my puppy."

Diaz walked from his place of concealment. Reaching cau-

tiously, he plucked Juan's pistol from his holster, found a knife and flung that away into the dark. Then he shoved Juan hard in the back. They went into the house.

Diaz shoved him into the kitchen and yelled, "Perez! Come down here! I have caught your kitten for you."

There was a noisy descent and Perez burst from the door, sweaty and dust-caked. He blinked at the sudden light, sighted Juan and exclaimed, "Ah! I see it is so. Wonderful!" Turning he called out, "Manuel! Come and prepare for our guest!"

In a moment Manuel waddled out of the doorway and into the room, also covered with dust, coughing violently and blinking at the light. He finally adjusted to it, saw Juan and quickly looked away.

Juan said coolly, "I would be ashamed for not playing the man too, Manuel. When I take this ranch you will pack your things." The steady, forceful gaze of the youth bore relentlessly into Manuel.

Perez responded with a burst of raucous laughter, "He is still talking about his ranch! What utter nonsense." He wiped away the tears of mirth.

Diaz said, "I have pulled his teeth. He may come to own a small part of this ranch but it will not measure more than six feet." He chuckled at his own wit.

"Well, take the rascal down into the dungeon. Do with him as you like, only, make sure that . . ." He could not make himself say the rest because Juan was staring Perez in the eye, calm, unafraid. Perez knew Juan would never return from that dungeon alive.

Diaz jerked Juan around and shoved him out of the room. The clanging of the door leading into the small dungeon area could be heard. Perez sighed, somewhat regretfully, but not enough to stop it, then walked out of the kitchen. Manuel turned and went for his small room for sleep and reflection. That he'd betrayed one who'd trusted him bothered him greatly. But he could not muster the courage to amend his deed.

Meanwhile Jake had gathered a small force of men from the village and were riding hard for the ranch. They had been riding now for some hours and it was nearing dawn. Light would be filtering its way over the peaks in another half hour.

They came on the guards at the gate with a quickness and unexpectedness that allowed the men to relieve the guards of weapons and stop to tie them up. They were getting ready to ride on into the grounds when one of the guards cried out.

Jake commanded, "Stuff a rag in his mouth!"

A man answered, "But no, he is trying to tell you something."

Jake dismounted and went over to the man. "Well, what is it?"

The man spoke, "I would join with you in ridding the land of these animals, if you would permit, no?"

Jake thought a moment. He turned to the men and asked, "What about it, boys? Any man got anything against this one joinin' with us?"

There were no replies so Jake whipped out a knife and sliced the man's bonds. He stood the man on his feet and asked, "Have you heard anything about the boy? Is he here?"

The man replied, "Si, he is somewhere around, it is believed. After you left he captured the Senor. Then all of the men except ourselves and two others left to hunt. Diaz, he was in the dungeon and the pig, Manuel, let him out. He tried to shoot the boy but failed. We have been hunting him all the night. We were sent out here finally after giving up. That is all I know."

Jake grinned at the news. "On a hunt! Now how'd that kid dream that one up?" he asked no one in particular.

They mounted, the guard, now a comrade, trotting beside them, and went for the house. As they neared the large house Jake ordered them to spread out. It was beginning to get light.

Jake reined his mare before the house. "Hey in there! You! Perez! Come on out and have a talk!"

It took but a few moments for Perez to find his gun and make his way to the front of the house. He was tempted to try

and drop the arrogant gringo from where he was but the sight of the men around him did something to his nerve. Instead, he crept to the doorway and poked his head around the corner.

"What do you want to talk about, madman?" he asked.

Jake drawled, "Here to tell you and your pet snake that you got about five minutes to clear out. If you ain't agreeable to that then you'd best start persuadin' me to think otherwise . . . with lead."

Perez sneered. "You have made a grievous mistake, my friend." His eyes held a confident, triumphant look.

Jake asked, "So what'd I do that makes you look like the cat that swallowed the bird?"

Before Perez could answer a noise came from the side of the house and something came flying through the air at Jake. Without flinching he straightened and grabbed the object. It was his greener. Jake didn't pause at all but lowered the shotgun and eared back both hammers in the same motion.

"You was sayin'?" he said.

Perez swallowed some fast-drying spittle. He'd only exposed his head at first, but while making his little confident speech he'd stepped out into plain view, convinced that he held the winning hand. Now he was regretting that and wishing he'd stayed behind the door.

"You cannot do a thing because we have your adopted son." Perez chose the phrase carefully, knowing it would give him another minute advantage. He added, "Your son is at this time in the same cell you occupied. He has a visitor right now." He smiled wickedly, letting the news digest, then ventured the last tidbit. "He is with Diaz. You know him?"

He should have been warned by the smoky look in Jake's eyes and by the flare of Jake's nostrils. Jake threw one leg forward and, without wavering the barrel away from Perez's chest, slid off the horse. He walked slowly to the man.

"How bad you want to live, Perez?" he said quietly.

Perez started to sneer, but something held him back. A frightening something was in this man. He murmured, "You

would kill Juan if you kill me."

Jake didn't blink an eye. He said, "Don't aim to kill you. Leastways, not unless you cross me up, or if that kid dies somehow."

Perez replied hopefully, "It is a standoff, no?"

"No. Sure ain't that, amigo." Jake shuffled his foot against the wood and then said, "Way I figure it you're gonna kill the boy anyway. So, all I'm tellin' you is, mister, that kid dies, you die too. You better work to keep that kid alive, now hadn't you?"

Perez tried to meet his gaze and could not. A blaze of anger whipped through him as he saw Gordo appear from the side of the porch. It was he who had tossed the shotgun to the gringo. His anger went to those seated on their horses, then back to Jake. He whirled around and went into the house followed close by Jake.

"Remember one thing, amigo. That kid dies, you die. And remember too, I ain't givin' this gun up for no one, for any reason. Even to spare that kid's life!" And Jake meant that. He knew that once he gave up they were both as good as dead. He was already prepared for the event should Perez betray him and attempt a bargain of some sort. He would kick Perez aside and poke the gun through the window. The boy might die, but Diaz would know for certain that he would die one second later. No way that man would leave alive.

They reached the door leading down into the dungeon. It opened without any noise. Jake was careful to close it and to do it quietly. They descended. A light could be seen in the room, shining through the bars in the small window of the door. Jake motioned Perez over to one side.

"Call him out here," he whispered.

Jake was standing to one side of the door. He peeked in and had to force himself not to cry out in rage at what he saw. Juan was stripped to the waist and spread-eagled on the floor. Huge welts were across his body and blood trickled from the corners of his mouth.

CHAPTER 15

Jake was ugly now. Perez could feel the anger in the man. He called out to Diaz, "Diaz! Come quickly!"

Diaz responded with an angry reply, then stomped over to the door. He stood on tiptoe and peeked out the window. "What is it?" he demanded.

Perez wanted to tell the little gunman about the gringo's presence. But it wasn't so much that he feared Jake, though he certainly did, but rather it was more because he feared what Diaz might do to Juan, just to make the big man kill Perez, and to make the big man suffer. So he did not give the hiding Jake away.

"The gringo is on the grounds and he demands to see you." He knew that would bring the little man out in a hurry. If there was one person Diaz hated more than Juan it was the gringo. Diaz hurried from the cell.

He gurgled as the barrels of the greener almost lifted him from the floor. Jake backed him to the wall. "In the cell, both of you," he ordered.

They went in the little room. Jake cut the bonds from Juan. The youth jumped up. Jake frowned in disbelief. "Thought you was near dead, boy!"

Juan smiled, "I was hoping he would think so too. I bit my mouth to make it appear that I was hemorrhaging."

"Well, I guess I better git on with the execution. You go on, boy."

"I am sorry, my friend, but I have a claim on this one." He nodded at Diaz.

Jake glared, "You're gonna have to produce some pretty strong reasons to claim him from me, boy."

"I have two strong reasons. They are both in graves on this land. He is the murderer of my father and my mother. One who knows told me and this dog sought to taunt me with it in this room." Juan stared relentlessly at Diaz.

Jake spoke, "Reckon I spoke outa' turn, boy."

Juan never wavered in his stare at Diaz. Now he spoke to the man. "For murdering my parents I, as the legal owner and heir to this land, and being judge over it, sentence you to death."

Juan said, "Now that we got the trial over, let's do it. I have dreamed of this for a long time." He looked at his uncle and said, "Diaz told me that you were the one who ordered this thing done. I suspected it but could not bring myself to believe it."

Juan turned to Jake. "Take my uncle outside. Diaz and I have some things to say to one another. We will not be long. If I do not return then I expect you to finish what I could not."

Jake, his brow creased with surprise, declared, "Boy, you ain't aimin' to give that runt something like an even break, are you? He'll eat you alive. Now, you just go on with the killin' of him while he's standin' there nice-like. Don't go trustin' him with no kind of chance." Jake's voice held a note of pleading, of genuine concern.

Juan smiled and said, "It must be this way. I could not live with myself if it were otherwise." He paused and when Jake did not object further, he continued, "Take all the weapons except his pistol and the one you have in your belt. Also, give me your knife. He shall have one too." He removed all the bullets from the guns except one. Each gun now held only one shot.

Jake tried again, "Just blow his head off, boy, and be done with it!"

Juan answered, "If I shot him there would be an end to it and he would not suffer. He must suffer as I have. Before I am through he will die more than once." Jake shrugged and turned to go.

He shoved the other out the door. Then a thought struck him and he turned back and said to Diaz, "Just remember one thing, killer. If he don't do the job on you I will. You ain't comin' outa' this alive any way you cut the cake."

Diaz, not cowed, snarled, "At least I will take this pup's life before I go."

Jake slammed the door. If he lingered he'd shoot the Mexican out of hand. Juan would then never forgive him. Some things a man must do and Jake knew this was one of those things.

Inside, Juan said to Diaz, "Stand over near that wall." He pointed at the far wall. He slid the gun along the floor until it struck the wall. Diaz moved slowly backwards, not willing to trust Juan. He neared the post where Juan had been tied by the wrists.

Juan whipped back his hand and the knife he was holding flashed in a whispering arc straight at Diaz. There was no time for the man to dodge. The knife buried itself solidly in the post top near Diaz's cheek.

Diaz had thought his life ended for a single moment. But no, the boy was only toying with him. It was a thing to be appreciated, really, and Diaz did. It was calculated to unnerve him and he had to admit, in spite of himself, that it did unsettle him just a trifle. But he was too skilled, too inured to death to allow such a thing to overcome his confidence in his own prowess.

He commented drily, "You throw a good blade. Too bad your talent will never be appreciated by the living."

Juan merely smiled. It was not a nice smile. The corners of his mouth barely lifted. It was more like the grin of a wolf just before he brings down his prey.

When Diaz was stooping for the gun he said, "I forgot to tell you one thing, Diaz. There will be no light in the room." So saying he leaned over and blew out the single candle in the room.

It plunged the entire room into almost total darkness. The dim candle in the passageway hardly illuminated the edge of the barred opening. It would be of little aid to either in the contest.

Diaz trembled with the shock of the unexpected action. It narrowed his chances down considerably from what he'd believed them to be. It robbed him of the quick shot he'd hoped the contest would be started with. And how could he throw a knife at what he could not see. He felt for the post and wrenched at the knife.

Something whipped across his side as he did so. He leaped away from the post. A mocking voice came to him from the

velvety blackness, taunting him. "A taste, Diaz. Only a taste. I could have killed you then, you know. I marked your side, didn't I?"

Diaz blinked away the tears of rage. The wound was not serious and did not pain him but the blow to his confidence and ego was nearly insufferable. The boy was a cunning devil. He placed the knife in the post not just to frighten him as he'd thought, but because he knew he'd find him there at the post as soon as the light went out.

The man moved along the rear part of the room. How he wished now that he had taken time to note the position of things in the room. But how could he have known the duel would be in the dark? Was the bed overturned? He couldn't remember. Where were the ropes? The bucket of water, where was it? Juan had manuevered everything into his favor. He was not the fool the gringo thought him to be, or Diaz had thought him to be either. This was not turning out to be the foolish and vengeful attack of a pup, but the cunning, well-planned stalk of a dangerous foe.

Juan, as soon as he'd doused the light, had moved for the post silently, knowing he would find Diaz there. He pictured the man there, heard the knife being pulled free and struck where he thought the man's breathing indicated he would be. He guessed correctly, although he'd intended to hurt Diaz more than he did.

Diaz would likely go to the wall to keep further attack narrowed to one front and to give himself time to regain his composure. Juan figured the man would move to the right and then lie in wait. That was what he would do.

It would be dangerous for Diaz to move about in the room because he did not know where things were in the room, items which Juan had carefully memorized and some things which he'd subtly placed around while talking.

Juan crept to the bucket. He took it, careful to make no sound, and went to the center of the room. He took the dipper from the pail. Softly, he tossed the metal dipper over where he

thought Diaz would be. If the man were anywhere near there he would make some sort of reaction, unless the man had nerves of steel, and Juan had been working to insure the man's nerves were not in too good shape by now.

The dipper struck the wall and fell into the dirt. A whirling sound, such as cloth would make on a body were it turned suddenly to face another direction, was audible to the keen, listening ears of Juan. Without wasting a second, having placed his man's position almost exactly, Juan acted.

The entire contents of the bucket was showered straight at the target. A gasp sounded, followed by a scurrying, then utter silence. Juan moved to the far wall, near the door. Lying on the floor for protection he called out softly to Diaz.

"See how easy it is to find you? The water could have been a bullet."

Juan slipped back from the door and waited against the wall. He'd almost expected a bullet to fly at the sound of his voice but, unnerved as he was, Diaz was not so foolish as to waste a bullet.

The minutes passed. Diaz's nerves were beginning to show their ragged edge. He resisted the urge that shrieked at him to send a bullet at the faint, mocking voice on the far side of the room. He leaned against the wall, suddenly cold from the water that soaked his clothing.

Juan, feeling the time was near when he could get Diaz to fire a shot, sought out the rope lying on the floor. Diaz would be somewhere on the wall where he'd started. The scurrying had gone in that direction and then stopped. It did not mean he stopped, just that after the momentary panic to flee subsided he'd recovered and went on silently. Juan estimated the man had gone to the corner and stopped.

Actually, Diaz had gone several feet past the corner. He sat, feet hunched under him just three feet from that corner Juan had in mind. He was listening intently for the slightest sound, hoping Juan would inadvertently reveal himself.

Suddenly a sound came softly just to his right. He froze,

wondering what sort of trickery might be afoot. The sound came again. A minute passed. Diaz wanted to move farther down the wall but was afraid that any movement might be noticed. He peered greedily into the blackness, ears straining. He decided that the first good indication he had of the youth's presence he would shoot. He could not take the waiting any longer. Better to die than to go on with this madness.

Something struck across his arms. He rolled to the center of the room, thinking Juan was somehow upon him. He came hard up against the youth there in the center of the room. They grappled, Diaz as one possessed by insanity, berserk with fear, Juan with the determination and fierceness of vengeance.

Diaz felt himself in the grip of one whose strength more than matched his terror-driven might. It was as if he was in the hands of the giant from Texas again. He was slung aside violently.

He fired immediately at the sound and in the direction he had come. The boy had to be where he placed his bullet. He surely could not move fast enough to escape.

The flash revealed a disheartening sight. It gave him a brief glimpse of Juan, outstretched, one hand to the side, moving it rapidly in the dirt. Ah, the cunning of the youth. It brought a sickening lurch to Diaz's stomach as he realized the meaning of the futile bullet. There remained to him only the use of his knife against the bullet, knife and magic of the boy.

"The time is near, amigo. It is not like shooting man standing where you cannot miss, is it?"

Diaz broke. He whipped the knife over his head and flung it as hard as he could. It sped through the dark and clattered against the wall. He was now weaponless. With a little cry he leaped through the black void, his hand seeking to find his enemy.

From a distant wall Juan's voice floated, "My parents died in the darkness, never seeing their murderer. When will I come for you, Diaz? It will be soon. Perhaps a stab in the stomach, or maybe a slice across the throat. But when?"

Diaz whimpered, "Please, I am finished. Do not delay. Please. I beg you."

"Ah, you beg? That is well, for I promised you that you would beg. Let me hear you beg more."

"Yes, oh yes. I beg of you. Have mercy."

Juan said cruelly, "I shall have the same mercy you had when you took the life of my family. The only mercy I will show will be that I shall end your miserable existence soon."

Only a broken, near-demented sobbing could be heard in answer. Then Juan heard the man regain some of his composure and slip off to one side. He had gone to another hiding place, this time near the door.

Juan called, "I see you there, Diaz. Did you know I can see in the dark?"

Diaz was ready to believe anything of this tormenter. The boy had completely shaken him. The voice came again. "Since you may not believe me I am going to prove it to you. I am going to use my own bullet. I will not kill you though. I will put the bullet in your leg." A pause, then, "Are you ready? It is coming."

Juan waited a short breath then said, "Oh, you are moving. Don't move. I might miss your leg and kill you."

That was too much for Diaz. He had indeed moved, as Juan knew he would, for what man, unnerved as he was, would stand when a man warned he was going to put a bullet in his leg?

Diaz was crying. Sobs racked his body. He gave up all hope of life, no longer caring, no longer having any spirit to resist. Juan walked over to the sobbing figure and wrenched him to his feet.

In a voice dripping with contempt and disgust he said, "I cannot soil my hands with the execution of a coward. You have the heart of a woman. I thought you to at least be a man with the courage to die like one. A rope shall touch your cowardly neck, not my hands." He called for Jake to open the door.

They stumbled into the corridor, blinking at the dim light of the candle. Diaz held an arm over his face to hide from the glare of the candle and to hide his shame. The light had snapped

him back to a reality that had been rapidly slipping away from him.

Jake clapped Juan on the back. "Boy, I ain't sure what went on in there, but it shore does my soul good to see that weasel, white-faced and dewy-eyed like that. But how come he ain't dead?"

Juan replied wearily, "He could not die as a man. He will hang with that one." Juan nodded at his uncle.

CHAPTER 16

The trial was made public, all the villagers with a special invitation. They came from far and near. It was not a democratic trial, by American standards, but it certainly was a fair one. Diaz and Perez were sentenced to hang.

Accusers came forth from among the people one by one, now that the long-feared Perez and Diaz were no longer in power. One by one they told tales of cruelty, of oppression, of ill treatment. One old, leathery-faced woman came and stood before Perez as she told how her son was taken from her, then shot and killed when he'd tried to return to his mother, to help her in the fields. When she'd finished she spat in Perez's face.

Jake went back to the ranch and found Juan dressing for a journey. With some puzzlement in his voice he said, "Where you headin', boy?"

Juan replied, "To see a certain senorita. Care to come along?"

Jake said as much that he might consider it and so the two were off in another hour. Several days later found them back in Texas where it all started. It was a tired and gaunt old Texican with a lean, smooth-faced youth that rode slowly into the yard. No one greeted them.

Jake stomped into the house without bothering to knock or hello the house. He saw his friend in the act of trying to write a letter. It was obvious that the attempt was not very successful for there were crumpled papers all about.

Hank looked up and Jake growled at him, "What makes you

think you got the brains to write a letter? You fall off your horse onto your head or somethin'?"

Hank jumped up. "You ole Injun! Here I was about to write the Mexican government to get a line on you. Me and the boys was set to ride down that way, see what we could do."

Jake laughed, "You're too old to make a trip like that, son. Leave the ridin' around to young fellers like us."

Hank grinned, his pleasure at seeing his old friend too great to take any offense. He yelled for his wife and daughter.

Jake said, "Reckon as how I thought I'd be helpin' the boy here but it turned out he's a regular one man army all by hisself." He made a wry face and added, "Now he's a full-fledged Don or some funny soundin' title like that. Might call him Don Juan, eh boy?"

Juan offered no comment. He stood just inside the room paying no attention at all to the two. His attention was directed to a certain dark-haired young lady he'd ridden all these miles to see.

His clothes were of the finest woven cloth. Snug, slightly flared pants fitted him in the tradition of the Spanish hildago. A pearl-white sombrero hung loosely from his fingers. Glistening black boots adorned his feet, while a milk-white shirt with a blood red sash at the middle completed the picture.

Juan murmured something and Hank said, "Yeah, reckon you might call him something like that."

Juan looked at Hank and asked, "Is it permitted now to court your daughter?"

Hank looked at his dusty boots and hesitated. Finally he said, "Well son, I don't know about that." He paused, knowing Jake was about to clobber him, then went on. "See, I ain't got no objections to you. But what with this old goat being your pa now it would make him a part of my family and . . . ."

He didn't get to finish the sentence because Jake clobbered him. And after Andrea and Juan had walked out the two settled down to talk about things. Things like Jake findin' a wife that would have him.

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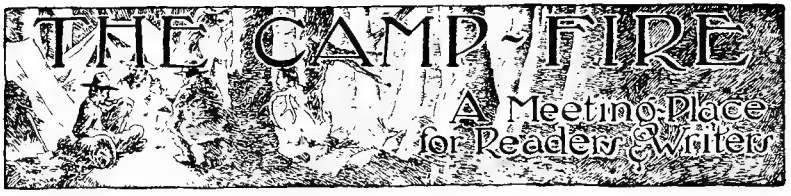

THE U.S. CAVALRY

I really enjoyed the July issue of FAR WEST, but had a question about the cavalry soldier on the cover. I have seen a lot of movies in which the soldiers wear yellow scarves and have yellow stripes on their trousers. How come your artist left these off when he did the cover painting?

Douglas Boyd
Hollywood, CA

What you see in the movies and what is historically accurate are often two different things. Troopers (they didn't like to be refered to as soldiers—sounds too much like an infantryman) wore a dark blue tunic and sky blue trousers. Only officers and sergeants had wide stripes on their legs. Trumpeters had two small stripes and corporals one small stripe. As far as is known neckerchiefs were never issued, but were purchased from suttlers out of the troopers own meager pay and were of whatever color struck the troopers fancy. In the field very few officers wore stripes on their trousers as this made them stand out from the troops, making them a natural target for their hostile adversaries. Jerry Wayne Downs, our cover artist, carefully researches his subject before setting brush to canvas and the result is exciting, accurate and historically correct. In this instance, a faithful reproduction of a trooper of the 1880s, accurate right down to his experimental pattern holster.

"DOC" STONE

Seldom have I read a short story with more color and action than THE NEW HAND by John Scott Stone . . . if I *ever* have.

I'd like to see more of Western life through his eyes, for they're far more observant than my own. And he can put it into words that I can't find.

Loris Troup
Green Valley, AZ

LIKES OUR ARTIST

Your work is terrific! You did a wonderful job of illustrating my story, THE TUBAC TREASURE. Your drawings added a whole new dimention to the piece, and I am very grateful!

Michele McQuaid
Oakland, CA

Gee, thank you—Jerry Wayne Downs

THE WILD ONE

Hey, I really liked Wayne Barton's story, "The Wild One." Can you tell me a little about his background? Will you be publishing more of his stories?

Mitch Damers
Renton, WA

Wayne Barton is a family man who resides in a quiet corner of the state of Texas. His work has been published both in this country and overseas in translation. Wayne is a member of the WWA, and future issues of FAR WEST will undoubtedly carry some of his stories.

LIKES FAR WEST

For a long time now, I have been going to the newsstand hoping to find a magazine of Western Fiction including short stories. I was pleasantly surprised to find the first issue of FAR WEST not long ago. Since then I have also bought the second issue and am looking forward to future issues. I particularly enjoyed "Death of The Great Spirit" in the April issue.

Eugene J. Buie
Waco, Texas

I really enjoyed the first couple of issues of FAR WEST, and I am really looking forward to your next issue! While I enjoy the short stories, I also like the ROUND UP and CAMP-FIRES sections. I think these are very informative. I would like to see you add a section with author profiles, so we might learn a little about some of the people behind the stories.

John Morris Vaceck
Houston, TX

Starting next issue we will do "Author Profiles" in FAR WEST.

FAMOUS AUTHORS

Yesterday I bought for the first time FAR WEST, the April and May copies. What great reading they were too.

I'm a great fan of westerns and read as many as I can. Is there any chance that Lewis B. Patten might write some stories for your book. He's my favorite western writer.

I hope your magazine lasts for a life time and more.

Steven Loar
Fort Worth, TX

Thanks for the encouraging words—we'll see what we can do about publishing some stories by Patten.

V.A. GLOVER—WHERE ARE YOU?

I have obtained from a newsstand a copy of your FAR WEST magazine and find it fine reading material.

However, I am interested in an author by the name of V.A. Glover. His short stories have been quite interesting and I have been trying to locate any books he may have written.

Could you please tell me where I might look to find any of his books or from what source I might be able to inquire as to obtaining any of his books.

I am very appreciative of any information you can give me.

William David Christian
Grand Rapids, Mich.

As far as we know, most, if not all, of Voyle Glover's westerns have been published in FAR WEST. We plan on publishing more of his work so keep an eye out for future issues of FAR WEST.

25 BEST WESTERNS OVERSIGHT

Being a collector of material on the old west, I would like to say that Far West is a fine periodical. Its stories may be fiction, but they are so real, you really feel it. It's time there was a good magazine of western fiction.

Your list of western novels contained some fine selections, but I was disappointed that Edna Ferber's *Cimarron* was not on it. That was a brilliant novel.

Keep publishing those great stories, and get Louis L'Amour to write some more for Far West. He's the greatest! By the way, I do some writing on my own, and I'm doing a story for a writing contest of the old west. Do you take stories that are sent in, if they're good enough?

Philip Davis
Nixa, Missouri

Thanks for the kind words—you can look forward to more *Louis L'Amour stories in future issues of FAR WEST. As far as your own stories are concerned, send 'em along. We are always on the scout for good western fiction. About* Cimarron, *you'll get no argument from us. It is a great western.*

COWBOYS AND HORSES

I am 9 years old and doing a report for school. Can you tell me what kind of horses cowboys used out west? Thank you.

Jeff Pellson
Youngstown, OH

Jeff, you must have ESP. Take a look at the EDITORIAL NOTICE in the front of this issue.

SUBSCRIPTION INFO

I am in the army stationed overseas and would like to subscribe to FAR WEST. How much is it and where do I send the money?

Doug Hooper, Spec/4
APO New York

Well, there is supposed to be a subscription card in each and every issue of FAR WEST, but these have a habit of getting used up mighty fast. If you don't have a card but want to subscribe the address is:

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BEST GUN IN THE WEST

My friend and I are having a little disagreement as to the "best" handgun used on the western frontier. In your opinion (the one we'll both agree to) which was better, the Colt or Smith & Wesson?

Teddy Rawlins
Burbank, CA

The Colt was slightly better than the S&W in the hands of the average frontiersman. The Colt was less complicated, and easier to reload on the back of a horse or at night. Most S&Ws held a slight edge in accuracy, but this was not enough to off-set their mechanical problems on the frontier. Probably the best gun in general use was the model 1875 Remington pistol. It's one-piece frame made it sturdier than the Colt, while it was less complicated than the S&W. Unfortunately few were produced, and for reasons I've never understood, none were adopted or tested by the Army. My vote for "best handgun" goes to the Remington.

was the ideal breed for foragin' and fightin' and large farms were established in Vermont to raise these rugged little critters. The hard pressed Confederacy had no such planned or fancy breeding programs and used available horses requisitioned from citizens living under the Stars and Bars. By this time the gaited horse had made its appearance, and was particularly favored by wealthier officers as the ideal field mount. General Lee's famous charger, Traveller, was a very handsome Tennessee Walking Horse, a type whose gated action provides the smoothest ride.

After the Civil War millions of men and animals headed west. Some took their military mounts, while others bought horses from the large stock pens in St. Louis or one of the other jumping off points on the frontier. What a feller usually looked for was a smaller size horse (in 1875 a big horse was anything over 15.2 hands*), about 14.2 hands high, with a short back and a smooth walk and canter. The trot was rarely used, except to urge the horse into a canter or gallop. The short back enabled the horse to carry greater loads with less likelihood of a sore back, the small size made for any easy keeper on the rough forage found on the plains, and the smooth gait explains itself.

Indian ponies tended to be smaller (about 13-14 hands) and generally less well kept. While it wasn't uncommon for a cow horse to reach twenty years of age, Indian ponies were often eaten before reaching five. Both Indians and cowboys seemed to prefer paint horses, although for no particular reason other than that they look "flashy" and tend to distinguish their rider. As a final comment the Appaloosa horse was not "invented" by the Nez Perce Indians. It is a common coloring found in many European types. The Spanish and Hungarians both used this color horse in their armies, usually mounting hussar units on them. Since they didn't really practice scientific breeding, it is probable that their large spotted herds were the

**A hand equals four inches*

result of inbreeding rather than carefully controlled matching of stallions to mares for a predicted foal outcome.

Cowboys used a variety of saddle gear, as did the Indians. Like horses, the earliest saddles came to America from Europe. And like the horse, it wasn't long before the saddle had adapted itself to the needs and demands of the rigors of frontier useage.

The first saddles to be seen in any numbers on the frontier were those used by the army. The most prevalent type of saddle used on the frontier in the post-Civil War era was the model 1858 McClellan saddle. This saddle was adopted by the army after studying the saddles used by other cavalry forces in Europe. Basically it was a highly refined version of the saddle used by elite units of Hungarian cavalry.

Lightweight, and easy on a horses back if properly fitted, the McClellan saddle was a favorite with three classes of frontier citizen. The trooper, towhom it was issued, and who didn't have much say in the matter; to the Indian who was fortunate enough to "liberate" one from one of Uncle Sams troopers; and those who had decided to recently "part company" with military life.

Cowhands, working the open range preferred a heavier saddle for pushing cattle around all day, a saddle that would provide greater comfort than the army "bun buster." Western saddles of a century ago were very similar to the modern western saddle, varying in only one or two aspects.

Old time saddles tended to be plainer, with less tooling on the leather, their seats deeper, with a higher pommel and cantle. Finally, the fork of the saddle was smooth, with no bulge in it at all. Thus the term "slick fork" when referring to a western saddle of the last century.

Cowboys tended to use plain saddles with the fanciest bits and spurs money could buy. It wasn't good unless it was nickle plated, resulting in cowhands refering to any-

thing well made as nickle plate, while anything cheap or inferior would be described as "brassy." The same was true of women and horses, and a nickle gaited horse was worth five of the brassy ones.

Horses could be broke or gentled to the saddle, depending on the needs and expertise of the rider. During the Civil War, the Army often was called upon to supply as many as seven thousand horses for remount in a single month.

Out west the Army took greater pains with the training of their horses, as did most ranchers and cowhands. The results were usually animals that were a cut or two above the horses that had been hurried into saddle.

In the west a mans life could usually depend on what kind of horse he had, and you can bet your bottom dollar that every waddie, drifter and trooper had the best horse he (or somebody else) could buy.

THE MARSHAL OF SENTINEL

By Louis L'Amour

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